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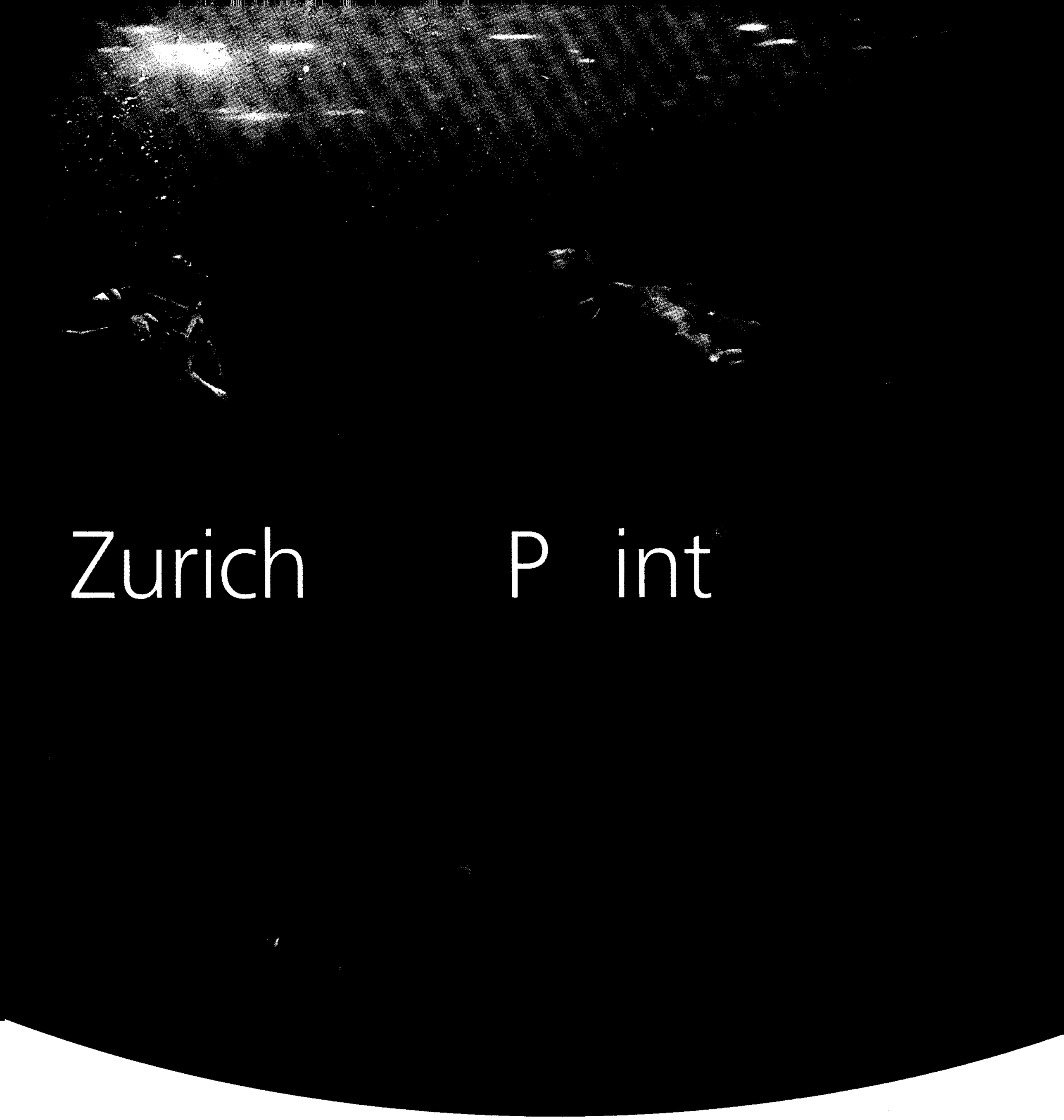

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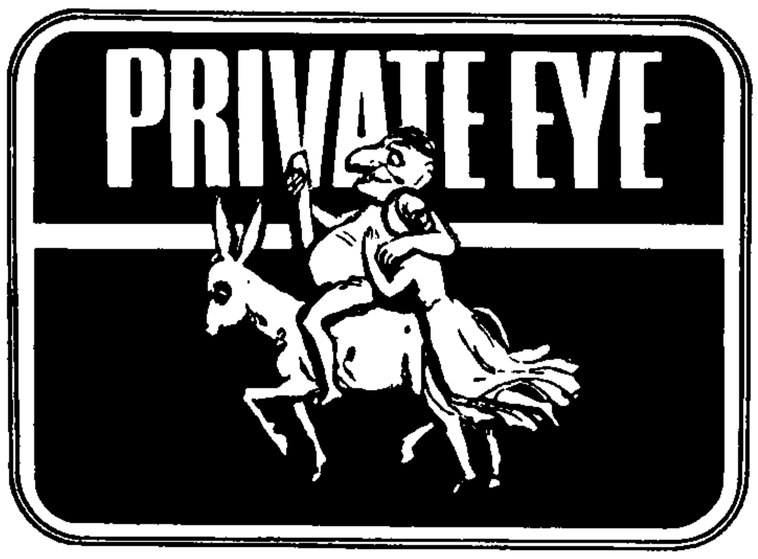

Extra dry humour

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AS the clean-up gets under way in Cockermouth there's little comfort for Cumbrians in the flood and water management bill included in the Queen's speech.

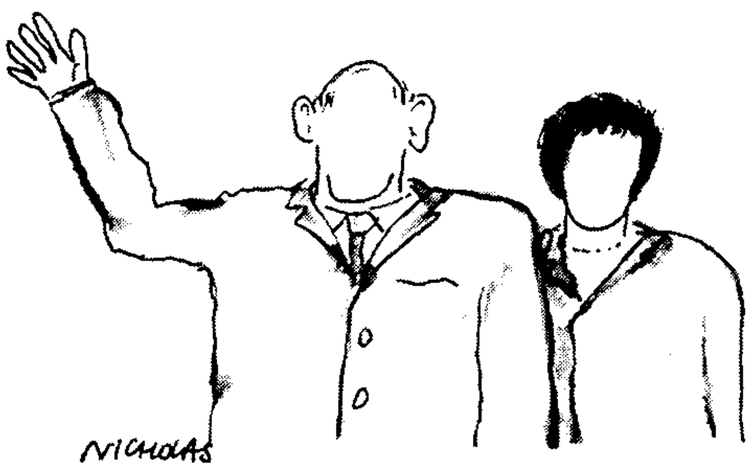
Even if the bill, which makes the Environment Agency (EA) and local councils responsible for managing flood risk, gets through parliament before the election, its proposals have already been criticised by everyone from insurers to firefighters.

In their responses to the draft version of the bill published before the Queen's speech, many organisations raised fears that local councils don't have "the skills or capacity to take on the new role and that funding and resources to do this were insufficient". Readers may recall that the draft proposed paying for improved flood risk management out of the, er, "savings from having better flood-risk management" (*Eye 1243*) – a true marvel of New Labour accounting.

Meanwhile, before the floods struck the EA was still requiring its staff to undergo "In their Shoes" training sessions to learn that "customer service isn't a department – it's an attitude" and how "putting yourself in someone else's shoes can help us to be the best we can". To add insult to inanity, all staff have been given polyester shoeshine cloths with which to shine their shoes. For flood victims wading through the wreckage of their town, shiny shoes are the least of their worries.

● *Environment Agency sponsor row, p9.*

The new face of Europe



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ABC

"It's Harriet Harman's ministerial car

BRITISH Bankers' Association boss Angela Knight has stepped up the bankers' fightback in TV studios and newspaper offices, denouncing Alistair Darling's planned limits on bankers' bonuses.

Knight has been lecturing on how bonuses are a good thing because "what we need to see is the preservation of high-quality talent and international banks operating here. The chancellor has to have that competition focus fully in his sights".

Like the banks she represents, Knight has herself been part-nationalised of late. The British Bankers' Association is funded by fees levied on UK banks, with rates based on the number of staff and the size of their liabilities. These fees can easily run to £500,000 for the top banks.

Now that the biggest contributors to the British Bankers' Association are partly owned by the public, the taxpayer is in effect paying for Knight to lecture us all on how we should stop complaining about banks. In the same way, we will be paying for the former Tory MP to lecture us on the same topic should she ever become one of David Cameron's new Tory peers in the House of Lords.

SURPRISE, surprise: in the government's programme for its last parliamentary session, there was no space for action on the lobbying and second jobs from which ex-ministers and mandarins benefit handsomely.

In January the public administration committee called for strict regulation on lobbying – official registers and records of meetings, for example – and second jobs. Ministers and mandarins should be "prevented for an extended period of several years from using their contacts and sensitive information that they acquired in public office to further their own and others' private interests".

But there was no chance of a government on its way out accepting these changes. "The government does not accept the general assertion that former ministers in particular are able to use improperly and with impunity contacts they have built up while in office," replied the cabinet office nearly ten months later.

Whatever happens on MPs' expenses, there's one section of the trough that will remain open for the better-connected snouts.

"I WOULD expect, most likely, that our exit is something that would happen through a series of transactions over time, probably, rather than one big bang," predicted John Kingman – chief executive of UKFI, the government body responsible for the taxpayer's stakes in several banks – in March.

In other words, there will be many juicy deals for the investment bankers who advise on these transactions over the coming months and years. Which might explain the unseemly haste with which Kingman is jumping ship. In July he announced he was seeking greener pastures and has now, after just a year running UKFI, revealed these to be at investment bank Rothschild.

The advisory committee on such appointments is certain to ban Kingman from working on the taxpayer-owned banks given his unrivalled inside knowledge (he also led the original Treasury bail-out negotiations), but probably just for the standard 12 months.

The sooner he can get the clock running on this purdah, the more valuable he is to Rothschild – a long-time favourite for government corporate-finance deals – and the greater the multiple of *his* civil-service salary he can trouser from the City.

MORE on the tactics of *News of the World* hacks, whose editor Colin Myler managed to convince the Press Complaints Commission that only one *Screws'* reporter – jailed royal editor Clive Goodman – had been involved in illegal phone-hacking (see the last *Eye*).

When officers from the Information Commission raided the home of private investigator Steve Whittamore back in March 2003, they discovered meticulous records detailing how hacks from a variety of papers had asked him for more than 13,000 pieces of personal information about numerous individuals. Whittamore and his associates gathered these via illegal methods such as bribery or "blagging" – conning telephone companies to release ex-directory numbers, pin numbers and the like – on a vast scale.

Twenty-seven of the hacks on the list were recorded as working for the *News of the World*. The list includes Rebekah Brooks (née Wade), editor of the *Screws* from 2000 to 2003 and now chief executive of News International; Greg Miskiw, the paper's former news editor; and Neville Thurlbeck, then and now the chief reporter.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"Margaret Thatcher is in the grips of dementia. It was revealed earlier this year that the former prime minister, 83, has been suffering from mental decline for a number of years." *– Sun, 10 September 2008*

"Lady Thatcher revealed she still regularly reads our pages at the age of 84."
– Sun, 17 November 2009

BROWN VISITS FLOOD ZONE

Street of Shame

AS Rupert Murdoch gears up to introduce pay walls across all his newspaper websites and intensifies his attacks on Ofcom and the BBC ahead of his new friend David Cameron's expected ascension to Number 10, these are interesting times for media correspondents.

Not least for the *Times*'s Dan Sabbagh, who has just been shifted out of his job as media editor after five years in favour of Alexi Mostrous, a twentysomething protégé of editor James Harding. Mostrous has been at the paper just two years, and has already tried out the role of deputy technology editor before informing Harding it didn't come up to scratch.

Sabbagh, meanwhile, is considering his options – and wondering, meanwhile, what happened to a piece he penned on 2 September detailing Simon Cowell's negotiations with Fox (prop. R Murdoch) over the future of *American Idol* and a proposed American version of the *X Factor*, which has vanished from the paper's archive. Colleagues describe Sabbagh as "independent-minded" – not considered a compliment among the higher echelons at Wapping.

"A TWISTED Army support worker in Afghanistan was slammed last night for posting sick snaps of dead bodies on the internet," reported the *Sun* website on 14 November.

"Last night one ex-military man said 'This website totally sickened me… Anyone could go on to this site including my own children'." Naturally, the article was illustrated with a selection of the sick snaps in question. Kids – log on to thesun.co.uk for hot corpse action right now!

"CAMERON wows mumsnet, again", the *Guardian* reported last Friday after the Tory leader spent an hour answering questions on the parenting website.

While other papers suggested that Dave's online session was a bit of a washout, the Grauniad preferred to take a more upbeat approach. "The mumsnet live chat has been a staple of political discourse for some time," it claimed. "The website's 850,000 regular users represent a key voter demographic."

All most gratifying for mumsnet founder Justine Roberts – and indeed for her proud husband, *Grauniad* deputy editor Ian Katz.

"ACTORS, artists and a host of hedge-fund managers are among those fleeing the introduction of a 50p tax rate," the *Daily Telegraph* claimed last Saturday, in a feature on "the fury driving the super-rich abroad".

In the interests of balance, the *Telegraph* pointed out that "the government sees the 50p rate as a signal: that the rich, who did so well in the boom years, must carry their share of the burden in hard times". What it wisely omitted to add was that some of the super-rich fled long ago to avoid their share of the burden even in the good times – not least weirdo twins Dave and Fred Barclay, the ageing Jedwards who own the *Telegraph*.

LADS' magazine *Shortlist* has been raving about Sir Michael Caine's new film, *Harry Brown*. "Unmissable," it declares, "the best British film of the year." The mag has also laid on a reader-offer tickets for the premiere and free screenings around the country.

Can any of this be related to the fact that one of *Shortlist*'s investors is former Freud spinner Kris Thykier, the producer of *Harry Brown*?

EARLIER this month the *Times* produced a special edition of its children's supplement *Young Times*, with features about spending the night at one of London's museums, to mark the DVD release of *Night at the Museum 2*.

Two days later the *News of the World* chipped in with a travel feature on the Smithsonian in Washington DC, clearly a much-desired holiday destination for *Screws* readers. "The Smithsonian Institution (named after Brit chemist James Smithson) is made up of an incredible 19 museums, nine research centres and the National Zoo," it babbled. "Film buffs also know it's the setting of *Night at the Museum 2*, starring Ben Stiller and Ricky Gervais, which is released on DVD and Blu-ray tomorrow."

Anyone wondering why so much space should be given to the DVD of a film which even the *Screws* reviewer described as "good and bad" is directed to the News International website, which shamelessly brags about the how the papers have been co-opted to work with the studio, 20th Century Fox (prop: R Murdoch), to plug the movie.

THE *Telegraph* unleashed "committed monarchist" Andrew Pierce to deliver a dressing-down to Ben Elton over his royal jokes last week: "The comedian, and I use that word advisedly… went too far in his cynical attempt to generate headlines."

So how far exactly is too far? What about running a lead item in your gossip column which claims that "Mandrake can disclose that the Prince of Wales suffered a health scare this summer", complete with copious quotes from "a friend of the Prince" claiming "he was convinced he was having a heart attack. He was rushed to hospital and underwent all manner of tests."

Also too far, judging by the correction the *Telegraph* published on 15 November: "Clarence House has asked us to make it clear that the Prince of Wales was not rushed to hospital in the summer. Nor were there any fears he was having a heart attack. The hospital visit of which we were informed was a routinely scheduled check-up. We are happy to make this clear and apologise to His Royal Highness."

ONE of the main aims of the Contempt of Court Act 1981 is to prevent publication of material liable to create "a substantial risk" of "seriously prejudicing" the course of justice by, for example, pre-empting the outcome of a criminal trial. But does anyone at the *Sun* know this?

Look at its front page on 16 November: "'NIGHT STALK' RAPIST CAUGHT. Dad, 52, snared after 19 years." At one time the *Sun* might have considered some minor precautions, like quotes around the word "rapist"; but no. The article about the named man went into detail about his private life and asked anyone who knew him to call the *Sun's* hotline.

The next day it had a "'Night Stalker' Exclusive" – an interview with the man's former wife, headlined "My hubby the violent bully" on the front-page and across two inside pages. The 1981 Act forbids publication of anything that might be prejudicial to a fair trial – interviews with potential witnesses, speculation about motives, details of a suspect's earlier convictions, etc. This "backgrounder" material used to be published only *after* a jury had brought in a guilty verdict. Not any more, it seems.

Sun executives are gambling that, this close to a general election, the attorney general will not risk issuing contempt of court proceedings – although, given that the paper has already deserted Labour, she probably has nothing to lose. But it has another line of defence, just in case. Last Monday's report included a quote from "a source close to Metropolitan Commissioner Sir Paul Stephenson" who said: "This is one of the greatest days for the Metropolitan Police… It makes you proud to be a cop." If top brass at Scotland Yard don't obey the act, why should mere hacks bother?

"Blood pressure a bit high. Cut down on the Daily Mail and increase your broadsheet intake"

IF ONLY Inspector Knacker and the Birmingham council fuddy-duddies, who believed a free Christmas-light concert with the likes of *X Factor* stars JLS and Alexandra Burke would attract only a few thousand fans, had read the local paper.

They might then have avoided the crowd-control fiasco that led to 60 people being injured, four needing hospital treatment and the concert and lighting-up ceremony being cancelled. "40,000 fans head for star-studded Birmingham Christmas lights," warned the *Birmingham Mail*.

THE *Observer* may have avoided closure but the alternative appears to be little better as hacks on Britain's oldest Sunday paper face a slow death by a thousand cuts.

Grauniad bosses, still smarting after their secret plan to launch the *Guardian on Sunday* was foiled, have ordered the closure of multiple sections of the *Obs* and three of its monthly mags. *Observer* hacks have also been told that they must re-apply for their jobs in the name of greater integration with the *Guardian*. The axe beckons for those who don't show enough enthusiasm for seven-day-a-week blogging and Twittering.

While the *Observer* shrinks, last Saturday's edition of the *Grauniad* was bigger than ever with two extra sections, one on "developing world issues" and the other on the joys of Spain. Happily for the paper's bank balance, although they looked much like any other *Grauniad* supplement, both were essentially advertorials, sponsored by GlaxoSmithKline and the Spanish Tourist Board respectively.

UNDER the deliciously sibilant headline "A Lost Glister", the *Financial Times* devoted a full page last week to the "barrage of criticism" hurled at Goldman Sachs in recent months for its greed and ruthlessness.

"Goldman declined to comment for this article – a sign, perhaps, that the negative publicity is fostering a siege mentality," it noted. "Insiders talk of being shell-shocked at the reversal in its standing and of fearing for their safety if details of their pay are leaked to an increasingly angry public."

Happily, this didn't stop editor Lionel Barber from co-hosting a lavish dinner three weeks earlier at the Victoria & Albert Museum with Goldman chief executive Lloyd Blankfein. The occasion? The annual £30,000 *FT*-Goldman Sachs Book of the Year Award. No "lost glister" there!

"GYM fanatics risk fertility problems," shrieked a headline in pisspoor freesheet *Metro* on 9 November.

"Spending too much time in the gym can reduce a woman's chance of pregnancy… Extreme workouts make fertility problems three times more likely."

So how did *Metro* fill the rest of the page? With a big advert for LA Fitness, which proudly announced: "Free gym membership until 2010. We're not joking". Perhaps not, but one of the sub-editors must be…

LARKSOME times at the *Daily Telegraph*, where "Thirsty" Will Lewis, fresh from his stint at Harvard Business School studying time and motion, has instigated what he calls a "360-degree review system".

Translated from management-speak, this turns out to be little more (and indeed, less) than a Benthamite plan for making hapless hacks tell on one another.

All staff must sign up to the Panopticon-style programme, which obliges them to nominate six colleagues and rate them for friendliness, time-keeping, quality of work, drunkenness, etc. Given their own past form, Lewis and his fellow plotter, chief executive Murdoch "Most Foul" MacLennan, expected the minions to knife one another gleefully in the back. Alas, those few remnants of the *Torygraph*'s dwindling staff quickly came to a collective decision to say only nice things about one another, thus making this Christmas's round of sackings harder to call.

Called it will have to be, however. The "360-degree review" is being overseen by a team of management consultants whose bill is already said to exceed the million-pound mark.

COMMUNITIES

"The gardening community has the potential to set an example of good practice which could ultimately alter the course of climate change." ***– Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society.***

"The devastating impact of oxygen deprivation has seen the death of hundreds of fish. The seagull community may be enjoying the bigger than normal food supplies." ***– Press release from Nikki Sinclaire, UKIP MEP.***

"Timber rattlesnakes are, in fact, a very valuable and desirable member of the wildlife community." ***– Globe Gazette, Indiana.***

"There are at least 1,000 people in the vampire community in New York City alone." ***– Michelle Belanger, author and former head of the International Society of Vampires.***

40 YEARS OF THE SUN

"I WAS alone in my office when the phone rang and a voice I knew began reading me Lord Hutton's sensational secret findings," confided Trevor Kavanagh, former political editor of the *Sun*, in the paper's recent series revisiting memorable front pages for its 40th anniversary. "I trusted the source implicitly. I didn't need to ask where the information came from."

Well, yeah. For as the *Eye* revealed in 2005, the person at the end of the phone was his colleague, reporter Clodagh Hartley, who had acquired a copy of the Hutton Report from someone who was involved in printing it (*Eye* 1133). She was instructed to ring up Kavanagh and dictate it to him so the paper could print a dramatic picture of him on the phone on the front page, and give the story greater credibility with the involvement of a "name" journalist.

SO WHO did the paper find to comment on its infamous "Gotcha" front page on the sinking of the *General Belgrano* in 1982? None other than "Falklands war hero Simon Weston", who mused that "it looks a little insensitive now, but the Gotcha headline summed up how Britain was feeling at the time."

Equally infamously, Wendy Henry, the *Sun* executive who came up with the "Gotcha" headline, fabricated an interview in 1983 with... Simon Weston, or, as the paper referred to him, a man "so hideously scarred people turn their heads from him in horror in the street". Her fakery was greeted with such outrage that she was suspended from her job for a month as punishment. This time around, we can probably assume the paper actually bothered to speak to Weston before printing his words.

SOME *Sun* front pages were oddly absent from the birthday celebrations.

These included "THE TRUTH", the paper's take on the Hillsborough disaster; the million-pound apology "SORRY ELTON!"; "ARE WE BEING RUN BY A GAY MAFIA?"; "BONKERS BRUNO LOCKED UP"; and the equally out-of-date grope-snaps of Sophie Rhys-Jones and Prince Harry which both resulted in grovelling climbdowns. But the paper really missed a trick in failing to look back to its special 20th-anniversary edition on 17 November 1989, which carried a startling world exclusive: "STRAIGHT SEX CANNOT GIVE YOU AIDS – OFFICIAL".

HACKWATCH

Stalls and balls

FLEET STREET critics always gather during the interval at West End first nights for a free drink laid on by the theatre, but at present these gatherings have the atmosphere of a pub fight because of the animosity between Tim "Wanker" Walker of the *Sunday Telegraph* and Ian "Shutters" Shuttleworth of the *Financial Times*.

On 8 November Walker spent more than half of his review of *Pains Of Youth* at the National Theatre fulminating about a fat man sitting behind him in the stalls, referred to as Giant Haystacks, whose "huge, hot tummy protruded ever more insistently". Everyone in the know recognized this as a swipe at Shuttleworth.

The *FT* critic's offence is not his girth but the fact that he also edits the trade magazine *Theatre Record*, which reprints the major titles' reviews, and in which he takes great glee in pointing out Tim's howlers and *bêtises*. There are plenty of them, though connoisseurs say that Walker has yet to surpass his early triumph, in a 2007 review of a National Theatre event celebrating the life of Lord Olivier – or "Larry" as Walker called him throughout, as if they were old mates. "Would even Larry," he mused, "have been allowed to black up as Iago today?"

Just before the *Pains of Youth* press night, Shutters had noted Walker's comment on 11 October about the current Old Vic production of *Inherit The Wind*: "I can't see it making a Broadway transfer... our cousins across the Atlantic are hardly likely to have the guts to put on Jerome Lawrence and Robert E Lee's play based on the Scopes 'monkey trial' of 1925." More likely to stop a transfer, Haystacks suggested, was the fact that the play was last seen on Broadway only two years ago.

A week later, Walker described Calderon's *Life Is A Dream* as a play "that only [Donmar Warehouse artistic director Michael] Grandage could contemplate putting on". If so, Shuttleworth wrote in the next *Theatre Record*, Grandage has been moonlighting under a lot of pseudonyms, since the play was put on at the Blue Elephant in 2004, the White Bear in 2002, Camden People's Theatre in 2000, almost simultaneously at the Old Red Lion and the Grace in 1997 and even at the Barbican in 1999 (when he seems to have used the alias of controversial Catalan director Calixto Bieito).

The following week he referred to the current West End production of *The Rise and Fall of Little Voice* as "Terry Johnson's version of the 1998 film", thus suggesting that Johnson had adapted the screenplay rather than just directing a revival of the award-winning 1992 play by Jim Cartwright that spawned the film.

Like so many of his errors, this is an embarrassment he could have spared himself by glancing at the programme for a couple of seconds. But Walker is far too busy for that. Besides his full-time day-job, editing the *Telegraph*'s Mandrake diary, he has a full-time hobby pursuing critics who expose his errors – notably Mark Shenton of the *Express* and *The Stage*, as well as Shuttleworth of the *FT* and *Theatre Record*. Early this year, when invited to join the Critics' Circle, he was at first immensely flattered; but when he discovered who ran the drama section (chairman Mark Shenton, secretary Ian Shuttleworth) he changed his mind.

On 15 March, ostensibly reviewing *The Berlin-Hanover Express*, a play about Nazism, he lurched into this strange digression: "Whether we say what we think or confine ourselves to talking about what is deemed to be safe or inoffensive is one of the defining choices we make in life. If we don't fight for an identity of our own then an identity will assuredly be imposed upon us. These thoughts have been uppermost in my mind lately as I have been agonising about whether to join the Critics' Circle... I have decided to decline the invitation." Thus he implicitly likened his gesture to resistance against the Nazis – a point emphasised when he drew attention to the "fat, sweaty" appearance of the main Nazi character in the play. It's no coincidence that both Shuttleworth and Shenton are generously built.

The Critics' Circle spat made it into *The Stage*, which quoted Shuttleworth as saying that although plenty of actors were paranoid about critics, "a paranoid critic is rather a novelty". Walker retaliated in his review of *Parlour Song* at the Almeida on 5 April: "The theatre is not an especially welcoming place for fat people. It isn't simply that the seats in most of the capital's auditoriums can't accommodate them – they were mostly designed at a time when no one could have foreseen the present obesity epidemic – but these individuals also have to see themselves portrayed on the stage in ways that are, to say the least, unflattering."

Not as unflattering as the comments made about Walker by his colleagues in the stalls, several of whom – including Paul Taylor and Rhoda Koenig of the *Indie* – sent letters of protest to *Sunday Telegraph* editor Ian MacGregor after the Giant Haystacks episode. Things turned even nastier on Michael Coveney's Whatsonstage.com website where "Shutters" and "Wanker" had a riotously childish exchange of views, Walker at one point saying "Ooh, Fatty started it!"

Things were therefore awkward during the interval drinks at the National last week for the first night of Alan Bennett's *The Habit of Art*. Shuttleworth and his gang stood on one side of the room while Walker (who had taken along his old *Mail* chum Rod Gilchrist to provide covering fire) stood on the other. Gilchrist, after a couple of glasses of free vino, bawled: "Tell me, Tim, which of those fat cunts over there keeps taking a pop at you?" At which point the National's press officers moved between the two camps, fearing there was about to be a punch-up.

How dear, dear Larry would have loved it!

AND The Insider inadvertently slurred Ed Vaizey last week, when a typing error led to the Wantage MP being labelled one of the top 10 sexist MPs, rather than sexiest. Many apologies to Mr Vaizey.

Wallingford Herald

ONE perverse effect of the crisis in public finances is that as government departments plan to rein in borrowing to make public investments, they will be even more reliant on the private finance initiative (which doesn't show up on the books) just as PFI becomes dramatically more expensive.

Interest rates for private borrowers are rising. As a National Audit Office memo shows, it now costs £6.3m more to finance a £100m PFI deal than it did two years ago – and £23m more than funding the same investment through government borrowing.

The memo was submitted to the Lords' economic affairs committee which is looking into the sneaky way PFI debts are kept off the government's balance sheet. Despite the sleepy backwater setting, the committee has already heard some frank admissions from PFI veterans:

Former Treasury mandarin Rachel Lomax admitted that in the late 1990s PFI was a "wheeze to get round Treasury rules".

The dishonesty of rigging the calculations so that PFI looked cheaper than public borrowing through manipulating the "public sector comparator" was betrayed by another ex-Treasury official, Sir John Gieve: "That was a pretty crude rule, I always thought, and it was one we were trying to peddle for all it was worth."

Former treasury accountancy adviser Professor David Heald meanwhile exposed how the Treasury has reneged on its promise to get PFI back on the balance sheet by deciding to exclude it from the national accounts on which the government bases its budgets. This, said Prof Heald, was "subterfuge".

"Wheeze", "crude", "subterfuge"… Will the committee see through the ruse? It has been deluged with "evidence" from firms that prosper from PFI, as well as the CBI, so much will depend on committee chairman and chief inquisitor Lord Vallance. He of course is a past president and current president's committee member of, er, the CBI.

CALLED TO ORDURE

SLEAZE, an unpopular government struggling to the end of a parliament, a laughably weak prime minister: it has often felt like 1997 at Westminster recently. So much so that when a grey, nerdy-voiced man with glasses appeared in front of a select committee the other day, it could have been John Major.

Hang on. It was John Major! Sir John, as he is now called.

Major, who spends several months a year abroad working for the likes of secretive US firm Carlyle, was giving evidence about non-politicians being made ministers. MPs are looking at the matter in response to the "Goats" (Government Of All The Talents) syndrome, which has seen the likes of Digby Jones and Alan Sugar being made Labour peers.

Major began with a superior little remark. "If I may say so, I am pretty dismayed at the disregard in which politics is held today," he said. None of it, apparently, was the fault of a former Tory government under which senior Tories asked parliamentary questions for cash and under which ministers shagged and lied to their hearts' content, the then prime minister having a trouser-dropping secret of his own to conceal.

Major said he was all in favour of unelected people being given government jobs. "A very attractive idea," he said, clasping his hairy hands in front of him, that prim, prominent upper lip immediately taking one back to the early 1990s. He was boring and infuriating then and, rest assured, he ain't changed much.

He thought parliamentary rules should be changed to allow unelected ministers to appear in the Commons. This is a fashionable theory in Westminster at the moment, supported by some because it would allow MPs to "get at" Lord Mandelson. But why should anyone ever bother to get him or herself elected if the exclusivity of the Commons is diluted in such a manner? Seek a public mandate? Pah. How old-fashioned.

The thought formed that, with the Tories looking a decent bet for power, maybe Major himself was planning a comeback, via the House of Lords. "I have never ruled that out," he said with an anal sort of smirk, as though his every word nowadays was a matter of public interest.

Major deplored the "sheer size of the payroll vote" – ie the number of MPs who are given jobs to ensure they will vote for the government. Gordon Prentice (Lab, Pendle) asked if he, when PM, had always appointed ministers on merit. Major admitted that he had sometimes appointed ministers to achieve "a balance" politically. In other words, he used the payroll vote system!

He went on to regret that there were so many professional politicians in the Commons today. "Where are the businessmen, the farmers, the soldiers?" asked the original dullard who himself worked previously as an obscure banker before becoming a machine politician.

Major burbled away about the noble calling of backbenchers and how they were the independent-minded embodiment of parliament. Could this be the same John Major who, in his desperate attempts to pass the Maastricht Treaty, used every tactic in the whipping book to force his backbenchers to vote for a hated measure?

Paul Flynn (Lab, Newport) noted that when Major entered 10 Downing Street he declared his intention to make Prime Minister's Question Time less partisan. A touchingly naïve Flynn had given new prime minister Major warning of a question he intended to ask at PMQs. Come the day, Major answered him with a sharply partisan reply. Flynn noted that it was hardly the act of a man who truly believed in change. "I am sorry not to have a total recollection of that incident," said Major blandly.

If Major was a little lacking in self-knowledge, he was perhaps not the only one. In the Commons chamber, Tory MP Douglas Hogg argued that "one reason parliament is held in such low esteem is that it is correctly seen that we are not performing our function properly, especially with regard to holding the executive to account and scrutinising legislation".

Might the "low esteem" of parliament not also have something to do with MPs caning their expenses and claiming public money for, among other things, the cleaning of moats at their country houses. The MP responsible for that particular outrage? He was a minister in the Major government and his name was, er, Douglas Hogg.

'Gavel Basher'

WHILE slagging off the Queen's Speech, David Cameron made much of what he called the "big omission" – that MPs' expenses weren't mentioned and there was no announcement of new laws to curb abuses.

In fact there is no need for new laws. Compared to many countries, Britain has a long and honourable record of passing anti-fraud and anti-corruption legislation. The problem is that parliament and Knacker seem strangely reluctant to enforce the ones we already have – starting with the Public Bodies Corrupt Practices Act of 1889. Prevention of Corruption Acts were passed in 1889, 1906 and 1916 and amended in 2001. The whole caboodle were rolled into one in 2006, and called the Fraud Act.

The 2001 amendment of the Prevention of Corruption Act states that a public official (including MPs) who "does any act in relation to his office or position for the purpose of corruptly obtaining a gift, consideration or advantage (for himself, herself or any other person), shall be guilty of an offence and shall be liable on conviction on indictment to a fine or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding ten years or to both".

This might well cover "flipping", passing off a relative's spare room as one's main residence, duck houses, moats and all the hundreds of claims exposed this year that were patently non-essential for MPs to perform their parliamentary duties. Not bad for starters.

ALL RIGHT AT THE PCC

THE links between the Conservative party, the Press Complaints Commission and the Dirty Digger's News International are increasingly intriguing. Consider the following…

The new chair of the PCC is the Tory peer Peta Buscombe. When she applied for the PCC job, one of her referees was John Whittingdale, the Conservative MP for Maldon.

Whittingdale chairs the influential Commons media select committee, currently looking into the future of self-regulation and the PCC. He is a friend of Les Hinton, Murdoch henchman and responsible for the *News of the World* at the time of the phone-hacking scandal. They dined together in New York when the select committee went on its "fact-finding" trip.

The PCC was supposed to conduct its own investigation into the *News of the World*'s behaviour under the editorship of Andy Coulson, but flunked it. Coulson now works at the right hand of David Cameron.

The PCC is paid for by Pressbof, the Press Standards Board of Finance, which has just appointed a new chairman. He is Guy Black, a former press secretary to Michael Howard and now "corporate affairs director" of the Conservative-supporting Telegraph group.

Meanwhile the PCC has appointed as its new director of communications one Jonathan Collett, previously the head of public affairs at News International and – like Guy Black – a former press spokesman for Michael Howard. "He's a terrific communications guy," Buscombe told the *Independent on Sunday* last weekend. "I don't care what his politics are." Pressbof has another Murdoch placeman on it – Clive Milner, managing director of Times Newspapers Ltd.

Of course none of this explains why the PCC has turned a blind eye to wrong-doing at News International, which has come out firmly for the Tories and is hoping that, in return, its skin will be saved by a grateful Coulson-Cameron team after the election. Or does it?

"Oh well, 'Per Ardua ad Asda'"

ECO-GNOMICS

RED faces at the Environment Agency (EA) where leaked documents seen by Eco Gnomics show how managers have been threatening staff who questioned the wisdom of having Shell sponsor the quango's annual conference.

EA workers have been using staff intranet message boards to express their concerns about the oil giant's involvement, only for the "Usability Strategy Manager and Forum Administrator", a woman called Janie, to remind members that *they must* "abide by the… employee code of conduct – which outlines how you are expected to behave as an employee of the Environment Agency." Apparently it prevents them from pondering the wisdom of getting into bed with one of the world's largest polluters.

At the same time the agency is showering its own (public) money on Cap Gemini, the private outsourcing outfit which is due to take over responsibility for running its IT in the new financial year. Elsewhere in environmental quango-land, the Carbon Trust has also excelled itself by awarding its "prestigious" climate change standard to a famously low impact British institution, Britain's largest mining company, UK Coal!

ARTIST Angela Palmer's "Ghost Forest" – ten enormous tree stumps displayed last week in London's Trafalgar Square – was intended to "raise public awareness of the connections between deforestation and climate change." But, as M&S would have it, these aren't just any tree stumps.

Palmer made what she describes as "several field trips" by air to the rainforests of Ghana – a 6,000-mile round trip – to select the right bits of timber, "most of which", she assures visitors, "fell naturally in adverse weather conditions". They were then transported more than 200 miles by road to the port, where nine of them were loaded on to one cargo ship – and one on to a different one. Both boats then made the 7,000-plus mile journey to Tilbury docks, and the stumps were brought to London by road.

"Nelson's Column stands over 50 metres tall, the approximate height many of these trees would have stood at in the wild," Palmer points out in the accompanying blurb. "It will be impossible not to explore in the imagination what a space like Trafalgar Square would look like if populated by such massive examples of nature's work." In fact, since the stumps are displayed on their sides, it is impossible for onlookers' overriding impression not to be how beautiful the intricate roots are, and feel delighted the trees have been toppled so that they get a chance to see them.

The stumps remained in Trafalgar Square for seven days, and are now on their way to Copenhagen (600 miles), where they will be displayed in Thorvaldsens Plads for the benefit of the UN Climate Conference in December, where Palmer points out they will be visible to "over 11,000 delegates from 192 countries", every one of them presumably blissfully unaware of the connections between deforestation and climate change until that moment.

By way of amends for the epic mileage she has built up in her one-woman quest to save the planet, Palmer consulted those well-known planet-savers JP Morgan and as a result of their report has "offset" 25 tonnes of CO_2 – approximately as much as is produced in a year by two and a half people in the UK going about their daily life.

WHEN former chief of the defence staff Lord Inge told the Lords that the armed forces feel Gordon Brown has never really been on their side and that they have not had his support, his wounding remarks were widely reported.

What received no press at all, however, was Lord Inge's subsequent apology to their lordships for not admitting his own Afghan business interests.

In his speech Inge had argued hard for both Conservatives and Labour to stick with the Afghan war and not delay before sending more troops. Four days later he had to return and admit that he had some of his own forces in Afghanistan. He sheepishly told colleagues: "I should like to make a personal statement. Before the defence debate last Friday, I am afraid that I forgot to declare an interest. I am the non-executive chairman of a private security company."

Inge is of course chairman of Tim Spicer's Aegis, which has armed guards in Afghanistan as well as a contract to supervise all the other soldiers-for-hire in the country. In January the US army awarded it a contract to help run the Armed Contractor Oversight Directorate (ACOD), which monitors and regulates private armed workers in the country and is meant to work with the Afghan government whenever private contractors are involved in killings or other major incidents.

This summer a delegation of US congressional inspectors visited Afghanistan when the oversight directorate was supposed to be led by a US colonel and several other high-ranking officers. Because of troop shortages, however, the inspectors found that "there were still no senior US military officials assigned full-time to the directorate". The office was therefore run by its second-in-command, an Aegis contractor, with Aegis staff.

The inspectors found that "Aegis is in a role of significant official responsibility in reviewing activities of other private security contractors". So Inge's company has a strong financial interest not only in the continuation of the Afghan war, but also in the continued use of private contractors.

"THE insidious City culture of excessive pay is seeping into the packages of some not-for-profit sector chief executives," fumes Britain's biggest trade union, Unite, which has 2m members.

Unite surely has a point about the pay of figures such as John Belcher, former boss of the Anchor Trust social housing group, who was paid £391,000 in 2008-09. Many of Anchor's employees working in homes for the elderly survive on little above the minimum wage.

Other examples of "excess", according to Unite, include the salaries of more than £100,000 drawn by senior figures at charities such as Age Concern and the RSPB.

But not every "not-for-profit organisation" with overpaid executives comes under fire from Unite, however. One of them has not just one boss earning six-figures, but two. Step forward Derek Simpson and Tony Woodley, who received a collective package last year of £308,000 as joint general-secretaries of… Unite.

Not-for-profit trebles all round!

'Blackleg'

Curse of Gnome

JUST three days after bent solicitor Jami Tehrani tried to disrupt the Paul Foot Award prizegiving (see last *Eye*), the Curse of Gnome struck and Tehrani was declared bankrupt by the high court and automatically banned from practising as a solicitor as a result.

Tehrani worked with Shahrokh Mireskandari at Dean & Dean, the upmarket legal firm that had once peppered the Metropolitan Police with writs alleging that Assistant Commissioner Tarique Ghaffur had been the victim of racial discrimination. Despite being praised by Keith Vaz, chairman of the Commons home affairs committee, which is meant to protect the integrity of the criminal justice system, and despite charging £750 an hour for his services, Mireskandari, the *Daily Mail* revealed, had been convicted of offences arising from a consumer fraud in the US. Instead of accepting that the allegations were true – which they were — Tehrani sent bullying letters to the *Eye* insisting that the judges of the Foot Award could not honour the meticulous reporting of Stephen Wright and Richard Pendlebury of the *Mail* because they had libelled Miskerandri. The *Eye*'s responded by referring him to the celebrated case of *Arkell v. Pressdram 1971*.

When Tehrani's letters reached the *Eye,* the former partners of Dean & Dean were desperate men. The Solicitors Regulation Authority had taken control of their firm; the Law Society had suspended Mireskandari while it investigated accusations of dishonesty and malpractice; and Tehrani was awaiting judgment from the high court in a dispute with Angel Airlines, a Romanian company.

Angel Airlines had alleged in September that Tehrani was personally liable for £140,000 of £300,000 it said Dean & Dean owed the firm for overcharging for its legal services. Dean & Dean had represented the Romanian company in a court battle with British Aerospace Engineering. The case was settled out of court, with BAE agreeing to pay Angel $500,000 [approx £350,000]. But Dean & Dean then presented Angel Airlines with a staggering bill for around £444,000. The airline sued to get the bill reduced. Judge after judge described the charges as an abuse of process and an example of "beanstalk" litigation, and ignored a direct intervention in the judicial process by the Labour MP and committee chairman Vaz, who wrote to the high court on behalf of his friends and implied that it was somehow racist to hold an "ethnic-minority firm of solicitors" to account.

Simon Browne, barrister for Angel Airlines, told the high court in September that Tehrani and others in his firm had repeatedly breached court orders to hand the money back. "In time honoured style Dean & Dean have ignored every court order there has been with regards to payment," he said.

On 22 September, the high court reserved its judgment. On 2 November, Tehrani threatened the *Eye* and on 5 November, the high court delivered its judgment and declared him bankrupt. He is now inviting more wrath from the implacable gods by winning a stay on his bankruptcy while he appeals.

'Ratbiter'

JUST FANCY THAT!

"TO PUT a stop to allowance abuse, Sir Christopher Kelly's report is expected to recommend that family members cannot be employed. Oh dear… Such talk gives ammunition to those who suggest some are only working for hubby to get their hands on as much taxpayers' money as possible. Perish the thought – it's togetherness. Working for your MP hubby is the ultimate togetherness as the demands of political life infuse everything else."

– Christine "Brown Envelopes" Hamilton, The Sunday Post, 1 November

ITV

I'm a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here! (ITV1)

RATHER like schoolboys playing football, media correspondents are prone to enthusiastically racing off in the same direction regardless of the wider pattern of the game.

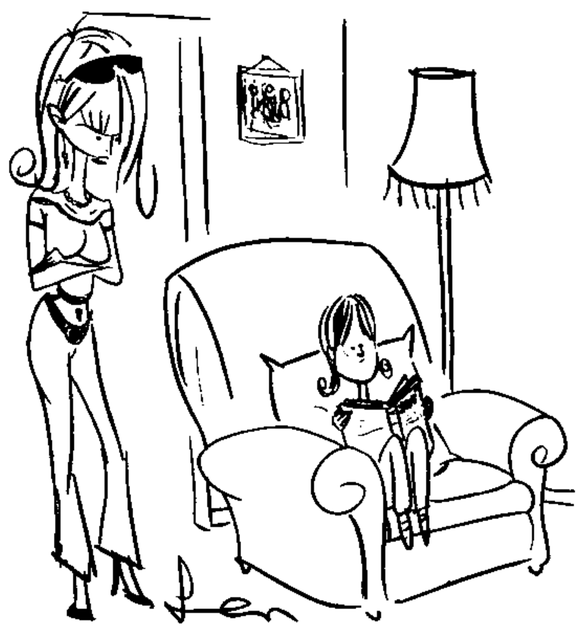
So, six months ago, the consensus was that ITV was in ruin – no advertising, no hits – while last week's agreed line was that the commercial broadcaster had made a triumphant comeback: that guy from Asda who Thatcher liked hired as chairman, *The X Factor* trouncing *Strictly* in the ratings and the schedules now supplemented by the return of its other reality ratings banker.

As often, though, this broad-brush picture of the tv industry proves to be misleading. The new series of **I'm a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here!** looks in such a mess that Archie Norman's first conversations as ITV chairman are going to seem oddly familiar – when to take a previously popular product off the shelves.

From *Celebrity Big Brother* onwards, these reality shows have been at their best when they feature either a genuine current celebrity (Martina Navratilova, Jack Dee), a forgotten figure being offered a second chance (Tony Blackburn, Jimmy Osmond) or a completely improbable booking for a reality show: Carol Thatcher, Lord Brocket. But the supplies of such people are limited and, in common with *Strictly Come Dancing*, *I'm a Celebrity!* has increasingly become a holding decompression tank for TV personalities on the way down.

It's a measure of how bare recent ITV1 schedules have been that, for the 2009 intake, the broadcaster hasn't even been able to use minor celebs from tacky reality shows on its own networks but has had to mine franchises made by rivals: Kim Woodburn is from C4's *How Clean Is Your House?*; Colin McAllister and Justin Ryan's property shows have mainly appeared on Channel 5; while the BBC has provided Camilla Dallerup from *Strictly Come Dancing* and chef Gino D'Acampo from *Ready Steady Cook*.

In desperation, they've also paid way above the odds to bring back Jordan, who is the format's most famous alumna after meeting and marrying Peter Andre in the jungle and going on to have lots of reality-TV shows, both together and separately. The couple are now divorced, although, bizarrely, Ant (or was it Dec?) seemed not to know this, joking after one of the numerous humiliation trials inflicted on Jordan that "Peter Andre will be facing a massive phone bill", which seems unlikely.



"How do you expect to get anywhere in life if you never enter TV talent shows?"

Jordan's presence has overtaken the whole show, with telephone voters determined to submit her to as many unpleasant lunches and plunges as possible: an example of how reality TV has become subject to revenge or ironic voting of the kind which kept the ridiculous Jedward in *The X Factor*.

And the format looks as tired and second-hand as the cast-list. Once, there was possibly something quite funny about supermodels who prefer not to eat at all finally succumbing to a meal which consists of dried-up kangaroo knackers, but the novelty diet has become an unrelieved one and there's simply a limit to how many times the audience can watch minor slebs being force-fed a slug supper.

Ant (or Dec) and the other jungle-mates can't even do the jokes the tabloid critics do about Jordan putting slimy things into her mouth and swallowing, because everyone's so terrified of being told off by Ofcom. Terror of the regulator is also apparent in the frequent health-and-safety subtext. The audience is warned that elderly Hollywood actor George Hamilton isn't eligible for several of the bush-tucker trials on "health grounds" and hoofer Camille, after feeling faint, abruptly left the show after consulting "medical advisers."

Typically of the network in recent years, the Jordan stunt also backfired. After a week's huge publicity – and income from viewers enthusiastically calling in to vote her off – Jordan's walkout on Monday morning, sick of being picked on for the challenges, left the show without the one contestant who was generating any interest.

The Geordie presenters consistently remind the contestants that they won't be given anything that might kill them and that the trackers will come to get them out of the various cages if they are in trouble. Although such precautions need to be the case – and viewers instinctively know that they are – the series becomes even more pointless if it's constantly stressed that any danger is an illusion.

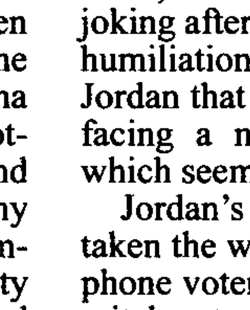
So, the centerpiece of the supposed ITV renaissance turns out to be a reality format well past its sell-by date. No wonder they went for the man from Asda.

'Remote Controller'

DUMB BRITAIN

The Weakest Link, BBC1

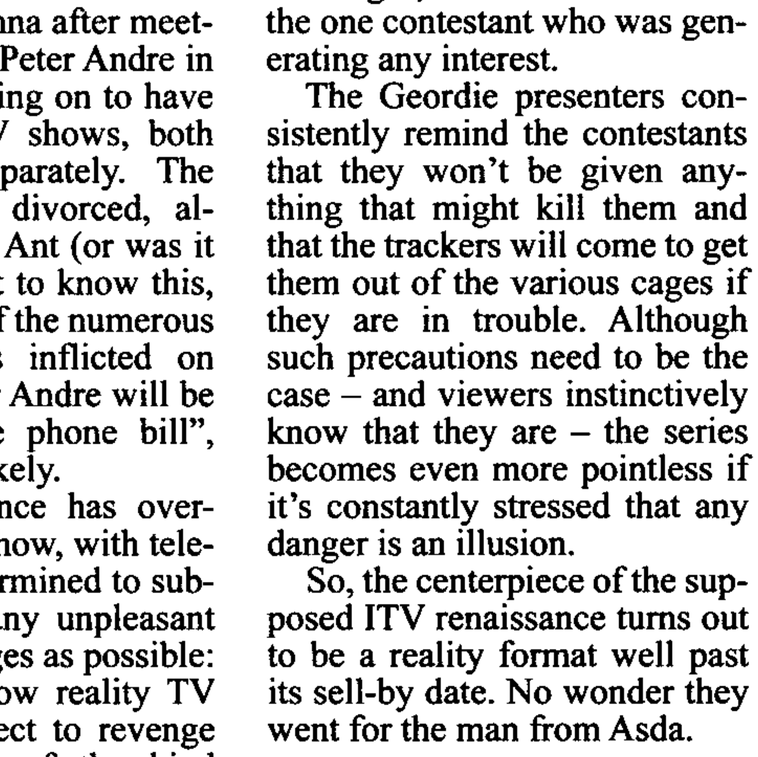
Anne Robinson: In Hamlet, a famous quotation is "Get thee to a…" what?
Contestant: Church on time.



AR: In Belgium, what Z is the name of the ferry port that's connected to the city of Bruges by a ship canal?
Contestant: Zellweger.

AR: What M, named after the Hebrew word for "institution", is the national intelligence agency of Israel?
Contestant: Al-Qaeda.

AR: In Winnie-the-Pooh, what type of animal is Tigger?
Contestant: A rabbit.



"Since you're a woman and getting on a bit, we'll be dropping your Christmas Day broadcast, Ma'am"

AD NAUSEAM

CHRISTMAS wouldn't be Christmas without a raft of chain-store advertising to suck the last drops of merriment from the occasion.

Some of the ads are merely laughable – Morrison's has been running a "seasonal offer" on beef as part of its "Christmas Price Crunch" that expired on Sunday 15 November. Yet what's most noteworthy this year is how interchangeable they have all become.

You take a generally well-liked celebrity who's prepared to become slightly less well-liked if the money's right. You surround him or her with Christmassy fodder – steaming turkeys, mince pies, blue cheese and ham – add crowds of honest folk in knitted jumpers looking content, throw in some pat notions of homecomings and family, and everyone gets that warm, mushy feeling which inspires them to hand over their money.

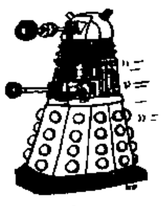
So, for its main campaign Morrison's has gone with housewives' favourite Richard Hammond, Sainsbury's has housewives' favourite Jamie Oliver and M&S has everyone's favourite, Stephen Fry, expanding his repertoire with another innuendo about mincing.

Morrison's has been filming again in Tunbridge Wells which, the *Eye* pointed out two years ago when Morrison's also filmed its Christmas slot there, no longer has a Morrison's because the chain closed it down.

The feeling that the advertisers have run out of ideas is heightened by the continued presence of Take That. Last year the reformed boyband starred in M&S's celeb-fest. This year their single "Shine" is the soundtrack to Morrison's Christmas offensive, and their tentacles even extend as far as Waitrose, which has employed a young unknown called Camilla Kerslake to sing the backing track to its ad (itself a re-hash of last year's spot). Kerslake is the first signing to a new label called Future Records, which is owned by Gary Barlow – the singer from Take That.

John Lewis, to its credit, has not taken That, instead opting for a cover of Guns n' Roses "Sweet Child O' Mine", a choice which is at least original. "This ad makes us stand out from our rivals as we try to avoid the obvious Christmas themes," said brand communications head Craig Inglis, who clearly doesn't consider frosty mornings, kids opening gifts, Christmas trees and snowfall as obvious Christmas themes. In truth, the only way John Lewis has really gone against the grain is when it comes to the gifts it wants us to buy. The average cost of the 16 items on display is a recession-busting £129.

BIRTSPEAK 2.0



"PROCUREMENT is targeted with delivering savings on generic goods and services pan BBC through a comprehensive category management initiative and driving compliance. The Category Manager – Logistics – Ground Transport is responsible to the Head of Production and Logistics and Senior Category Manager, Logistics for:

Developing a strategy for the procurement and development of a supplier strategy for the BBC's ground transport provision.

Managing the resources needed to procure and develop the ground transport aspect of the Logistics Category.

Influencing key stakeholders and customers, pan-BBC…

Competencies:

Using external thinking – builds bridges with useful organisations and innovative thinkers.

Collaborating across boundaries – challenges systems, processes and people that block collaboration.

Leading creativity – fosters imagination, creativity and experimentation."

– Job advert for someone to deal with booking taxis and couriers, BBC website

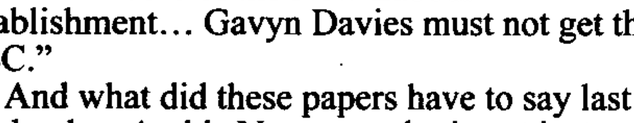
MEDIA NEWS

WHEN banker Gavyn Davies was appointed as chairman of the BBC back in September 2001, the Conservative papers were apoplectic at his membership of, and past donations to, the Labour party.

"Tony got his crony," thundered the *Telegraph*. "The dangers to the independence and reputation of the BBC are obvious." "This is not a happy day for a BBC that was once a byword for objectivity and integrity throughout the world," wailed the *Mail*. The *Sun* was even firmer: "The BBC chairman's role is to ensure distance between the corporation and government. He sits right at the core of the New Labour establishment... Gavyn Davies must not get the BBC."

And what did these papers have to say last week when Archie Norman, who is not just a member of the Conservative party but served as its chief executive and an MP for eight years, was appointed as chairman of ITV, which, just like the BBC, is required "to ensure that news, in whatever form, is presented with due impartiality"?

He will, the *Telegraph* reported, be "a boon for ITV – its shareholders should be extremely happy. A shrewd move... has met with apparently universal acclaim." The *Mail* noted approvingly that "if the Conservatives win the general election, he will bring the broadcaster close links to senior figures in government." And the *Sun* – whose proprietor Rupert Murdoch still owns a 17.9 percent stake in ITV – did not think it worthy of any comment whatsoever.



"I have to say, you're not the brooding teenage vampire with emotional issues that I've been led to expect"

AMONG the more interesting aspects of the expenses claim revealed by the BBC's director-general, Mark Thompson, includes the list of costs incurred before he joined the corporation.

Until 22 June 2004, Thompson was chief executive of Channel 4, but he was clearly involved in a series of discussions with the BBC well before then about taking up the DG's job.

On 9 June 2004 he claimed £105 "to discuss BBC job", followed by another £97.03 "to discuss BBC job" the very next day. There's also a claim for £20, for a "meeting with Alan before officially joining the BBC", a meeting that Alan "Botney" Yentob also claimed for, as well as another £415 for various social events before joining the BBC, including both "dinners" and "drinks".

He was, naturally, still on Channel 4's payroll at the time, but generous BBC licence-payers have nonetheless picked up his tab – much to the relief of Channel 4's accountants!

"AT LEAST 37 BBC executives earn more than the prime minister," the *Times* reported with thunderous disapproval on 13 November. "The revelations put pressure on the Tories to spell out how they would restrain pay in the corporation."

Alas, the *Times* didn't have room to mention in its story that Jeremy Darroch, Sky's chief executive, trousered £2.34m last year – nearly treble what BBC director-general Mark Thompson earned and more than ten times the prime minister's salary.

THE only staff in BBC News to escape the "value for money" squeeze thus far are the growing armies of dedicated "multi-media platform teams" who are tasked with turning a radio programme or TV series into unread pages on the BBC website.

But even they now face an uncertain future. While the BBC News online pages continue to be popular, most of the current-affairs content remains largely traffic-free and producers are tiring of having to write copy for the teams to cut 'n' paste into their web pages when there are endless Ofcom compliance forms to be filled in and other more pressing production deadlines to meet.

Many producers who actually make programmes have now been trained in the arts of publishing their own web content. The course only takes a few hours and some are questioning the need for a "dedicated" team, when it dawns on them that a trained monkey could do the work in a matter of minutes.

This may explain why increasingly desperate multi-media team leaders are pointlessly bombarding their Luddite colleagues with internal emails about how "brilliantly" they are doing, despite never generating any original journalism themselves.

IMAGINE: Yentob Meets Bassey

GOING LIVE

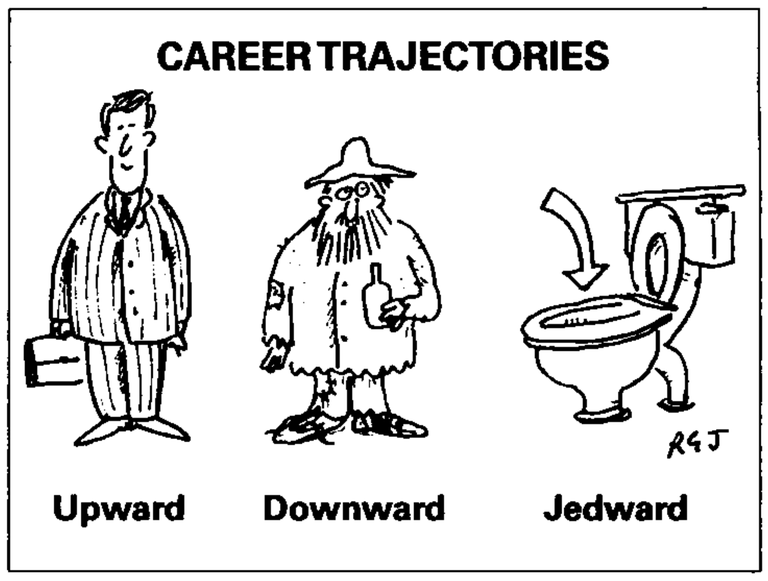
"AND now let's go live over to the Guildhall where Gordon Brown is about to make an important speech," Tim Willcox told viewers of the BBC News channel on 16 November.

The camera then cut to... the Lord Mayor of London, still giving his speech, leaving Willcox with nothing to say except "And Gordon Brown will begin his speech as soon as... er... as soon as this man has finished." Insight indeed!

EQUALLY sick of the ongoing circus surrounding the end of Peter Andre and Katie Price's relationship and the blizzard of injunction notifications that have been landing on her desk, Camilla Wright, editor of gossip website Popbitch, decided to take action.

"I realised that even trying to avoid reading or hearing news about them, I couldn't go into a newsagents without learning details about Peter Andre and Jordan that I wouldn't want to know about my best friends," she tells the *Eye*. She instructed her lawyer to look into whether the Human Rights Act offered any redress for members of the public who felt their privacy had been invaded by the warring pair, with a view to taking legal action requiring them to shut up about themselves.

Sadly, after 24 hours' hard work, he reported back that the British people have "no legal redress whatsoever" against celebrities invading their privacy.



HONORARY DEGREES

THE *Eye* had been hoping this week to celebrate the recent receipt of an honorary doctorate by Sir Terry Leahy, CEO of Tesco, from the University of Hertfordshire.

However, Tesco not only forbade Hertfordshire to provide a photo of the happy occasion, but it leant on the university so much that it then nobbled the local photographer too and prevented them supplying one.

So we had to do the best we could with an artist's impression...

EHEU NON ECCE
HOMO ET NON
HABEUS CORPUS
QUOD TESCOS
NOBBLERUNT
PHOTOGRAPHORES
ET RECUSAVERUNT
PERMISSIONIS SIC
TESCOS MODUS OPERANDI. HIC
COMMUTAMUS IMAGO CUM
IMPRESSIONE ARTIFICE

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

UPROAR OVER KATE MOSS PRO-ANOREXIA MOTTO!
GOD!..... IF ONLY I COULD EAT MY WORDS!.....
.....I WOULDN'T BECAUSE NOTHING TASTES AS GOOD AS SKINNY FEELS!!!

SIGNAL FAILURES

Bailout news

THE recession is showing yet again how little financial risk private train firms shoulder in return for their huge profits.

National Express Group has walked away from its ailing East Coast franchise but keeps its two profitable franchises *and* the government bailouts that "underpin" profits at one of them.

FirstGroup has revealed its two most recent franchises get almost £13m in government bailouts every month. This year's deflation means regulated fares will fall 0.4 percent in January (still a 1 percent rise in real terms) but franchisees are free to compensate with unlimited hikes in other fares, eg up to 15 percent on bailed-out First Great Western.

Yet train firms still complain of shouldering too much risk. The Association of Train Operating Companies (Atoc) wants rail franchising reformed for "better sharing of risk between the operator and government", to ease pressure from external developments "which can seriously affect even well-run operators of soundly planned franchises".

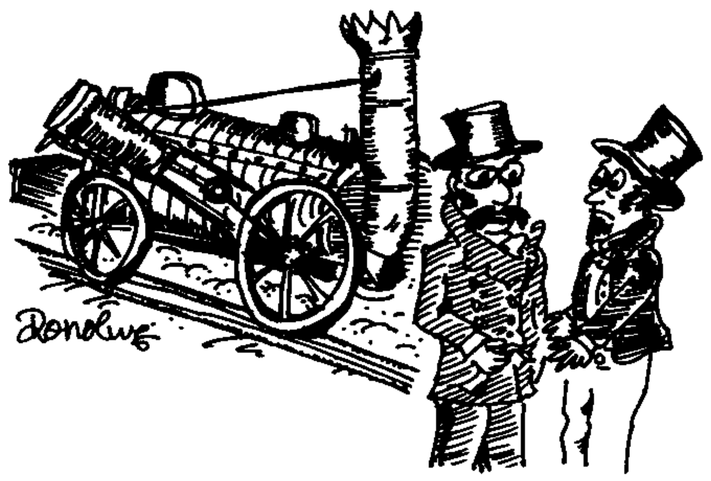
So how seriously has recession affected train firms? FirstGroup's rail profits rose 5.2 percent, to £51m, in the six months to 30 September. Arriva took £10m profit from its two franchises in the six months to 30 June. Go-Ahead made £62m profit in the year to 27 June from its stake in three franchises. Virgin Rail's revenue was 6.9 percent up in the 24 weeks to 18 October.

When they look up from the trough, train firms see Network Rail spending and borrowing liberally because NR's funding till 2014 was fixed before the recession. Atoc whines that the railways' structure "concentrates much of the industry's revenue risk with train operating companies, rather than perhaps sharing some of it with Network Rail". But do train companies really want to discard the stability of NR's five-year funding periods? If NR had to respond to short-term economic conditions, longer-term projects like easing the Thameslink and Reading bottlenecks could now be shelved, skilled workers would be lost and maintenance cuts would increase infrastructure failures – all to franchisees' detriment.

NR isn't free of cost pressures; the Office of Rail Regulation sets targets for better efficiency after benchmarking NR against foreign railways. Meanwhile the National Audit Office didn't benchmark rail franchising against foreign railways (*Eye* 1222). Happily for the army of hangers-on at places like Atoc and the ORR, there are no targets to cut inefficiency in the franchised rail system.

PS: On the day East Coast took over from the franchise defaulting National Express Group, transport secretary Lord Adonis made a celebratory journey to York and back using scheduled trains. But how confident was he that after 12 years of Labour oversight, the railway wouldn't embarrass him? Er, just to make sure, an empty train followed Adonis a few minutes later in both directions.

'Dr B. Ching'



"Look, Stephenson, just tell me how it works – it's not rocket science"

MEDICINE BALLS

Death during birth

SHOULD there be waiting-time targets for post mortem examinations? It's not uncommon for relatives to wait four months or more for the results of a post mortem, particularly when a baby has died. And this is not a new problem.

In September 2007, the Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology expressed "disquiet" at the numbers of deaths during delivery, and the inadequacy of investigation due to poor access to expert paediatric pathologists. This was noted in a committee meeting of the Royal College of Pathologists on 17 September, but little progress seems to have been made.

Autopsy information does not always provide answers. If an apparently healthy baby dies, it can take some weeks to do extensive infection screens to try to find a cause, though often none is found. But the extreme delays in some PM reporting are more likely due to a shortage of paediatric pathologists, a speciality that became very unattractive after the organ-retention vilification post-Alder Hey and Bristol. Not having timely access to such vital information is frustrating for clinical staff, who need to audit their work to understand if they could have done anything different to prevent death, but the wait for the parents must be unimaginable.

Mel Leaver had a normal pregnancy and went into Musgrove Park Hospital after her waters broke. On arrival, some meconium was noted, a possible sign of foetal distress, and she was kept in for monitoring. The baby's heartbeat remained strong throughout the night until Mel noticed a sudden drop. A scan confirmed the heartbeat had slowed and an emergency caesarean was performed. Finley John Scott was born without a heartbeat on 2 August 2009, and staff were unable to resuscitate him. Finley weighed 9lb 7oz, a seemingly healthy baby. He was transferred to Bristol for a post mortem examination, and Mel and her husband Baz have waited 17 weeks for the results.

Around 500 deaths occur each year during childbirth, a situation described by the chief medical officer Liam Donaldson in 2006 as "500 lost opportunities". The CMO observed that the cause of such deaths had not been studied in detail since 1995. In 2008, obstetric professor James Drife suggested that the subject of death during birth had been "quietly dropped". "Highlighting the risks of childbirth has become politically unfashionable and there has been little political recognition of the link between safe childbirth and the availability of obstetricians. The analysis of such deaths might also raise the issue of inadequate staffing levels in our labour wards, a major concern for both midwives and obstetricians."

For parents like Mel and Baz, getting honest answers from the NHS isn't easy. The 17-week wait for PM results has been traumatic and raised suspicions. Midwives in Taunton have told Mel of five other full-term babies who have died during or shortly after birth, but the spectre of litigation often prohibits open debate about whether anything could have been done to save babies like Finley. And as Professor Drife points out: "Obstetricians are often too readily excluded from so-called 'low-risk' pregnancies" that turn out to be anything but. "These attitudes have been described as 'giving up on getting better'. Sooner or later women will demand improvement, probably through the courts, but surely we do not have to wait for litigation or a public enquiry before we take action".[1]

M.D.

[1] www.future-science-group.com/_img/pics/Can_we_reduce_perinatal_mortality_in_the_UK.pdf

"Would you mind if some students watch while you become increasingly irritated by the waiting and the staff shortages?"

The Agri Brigade

ENGLISH farmers have become so used to cock-ups at the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) that the most recent scandal – the loss of "data tapes" containing their bank details – prompted little more than a resigned collective shrug.

Set up in 2001 by the Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), the RPA was designed to create detailed farm maps, trace cattle movements and deliver payments to farmers. Instead it has become known as a grotesque symbol of government inefficiency, waste and political buck-passing.

Even before the recent "farmergate tapes" incident, involving deep throat whistleblowers and suggestions of an attempted cover-up, the National Audit Office (NAO) reported last month that between 2005 and 2009 the RPA had squandered £680m of taxpayers' cash on admin mix-ups.

For example, £304m was spent on extra staff to cope with incorrect payments to farmers and a "poorly designed IT system"; and £43m was frittered on "overpayments" that cannot be recovered. Farmers meanwhile were clobbered with £52m in fees and charges due to late and inaccurate payments.

To add insult to taxpayer injury, Defra has now had to set aside £280m in "penalties" for poor administration which will have to be paid to that byword for financial competence, the European Commission, in fines.

An understandably frustrated Amyas Morse, head of the NAO, says there's been "a lack of senior management ownership" at Defra. This is despite two previous reports by the NAO which have already highlighted shortcomings at the RPA. The NAO calculates that the administrative costs of paying an English farmer a claim from a Defra scheme has now risen to £1,743. With considerable understatement it describes this cost as "high" when compared to, say, Scotland where the cost of processing a similar claim is £285.

What Morse has perhaps failed to understand is that the RPA has become such a disgrace Defra ministers have tried to pretend they are not accountable for their own executive agency. Rather than ministers taking the rap by resigning, senior RPA staff have instead fallen on their swords in response to each new crisis – a golden handshake usually compensating them for being a convenient scapegoat.

Meanwhile, beleaguered English farmers now have to cope with the worry that their bank details may have been "leaked" on top of the stress they're suffering through delayed or incorrect RPA payments. They should remember that Defra is a big ministry with many more important issues on its plate than sorting out the RPA. Only recently secretary of state Hilary Benn and his Defra team had to launch an emergency redesign of their website (cost: £180,000) after a focus group said it had too much brown in it and looked "too agricultural".

'New Bio-waste Spreader'

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

TOXIC ASSETS

WHAT do you call a 72-acre former asbestos factory, riddled with contamination? If you're Rochdale council, you call it a site destined to become "an urban village" and hope no one asks about the hundreds of tons of asbestos dust in the soil.

The original scheme to build more than 300 homes on the former HQ of Turner and Newall Asbestos was scuppered by a concerted local campaign and an *Eye* investigation, starting in 2005, which found that developer Countryside Properties had dramatically misrepresented the extent of contamination. After Countryside pulled out, its local partner MMC Developments was left with a site that would be impossible to develop safely without costly remediation. MMC is still stuck with it, and a massive loan from Royal Bank of Scotland – appropriately, one might think, for such a toxic asset.

Even though a succession of reports have pointed out that the site is riddled with lethal asbestos, and despite a century of asbestos cancer deaths in the town, the council has never designated it "contaminated land" – until now. Documents seen by the *Eye* show that the council is considering taking its begging bowl to Defra for the millions it would take to clean up the site. Meanwhile a meeting is being set up between the council, MMC and the Homes & Communities Agency about the possibility of the government forking out to help develop the site for housing.

And why not? If taxpayers can bail out dodgy banks, why should property speculators be left out in the cold?

PORN LEADER

DOUBLE standards seem to be at work in Bournemouth, where 20 council staff were suspended for up to 16 days earlier this year for the heinous crime of swapping dirty jokes on the council's email system.

Compare and contrast their treatment to the "unanimous" support given by the council's Tory group to Stephen MacLoughlin, Tory leader of the council, who used his council laptop to view porn.

After "top shelf" material from an "unauthorised website" was found on his computer last year, the council launched a secret "investigation" (conducted by the aptly-named Joy Postings). There were calls for MacLoughlin's resignation after the local *Echo* newspaper broke the story last month, but the leader said he was staying put. A meeting of the council's Tory group, chaired by MacLoughlin's pal and deputy, John Beesley, concurred unanimously.

PS: Other councils are less laid-back about staff using council computer equipment to view mucky pictures. In 2005 Knowsley council's PR supremo Carol Lamb resigned after colleagues found "intimate pictures of a personal nature" taken by her husband on her council-supplied laptop. She was then fired after a day in her new job at Bedfordshire county council when her employer found out. Two years ago *Eye* 1200 reported that former Swansea council leader Lawrence Bailey had been banned from sitting as a councillor after a stash of porn was found on his council computers.

KITTEN HEEL

WHEN culture minister Margaret Hodge visited the east Kent seaside earlier this month on a gracious progress to hand out "Sea Change" regeneration grants, she probably didn't give a second glance to the security guard on the gate of Margate's defunct Dreamland amusement park. A pity, because he was, in fact, the town's mayor and would normally have been on meet-and-greet duties for a visiting VIP.

So why did Conservative Cllr Ted Watt-Ruffell eschew the ermine when Ms Hodge turned up with £3.7m to turn the fire-ravaged Dreamland (*Eyes passim*) into the world's first "vintage amusement park"?

Perhaps Cllr Ted is keeping a low profile because he and his wife are currently being prosecuted by the RSPCA for allegedly causing a kitten unnecessary suffering. The Watt-Ruffells are alleged to have failed to provide veterinary care and adequate flea treatment for Ruby the kitten, who later died from anaemia. According to the RSPCA, the mayor has applied for the case to be heard 50 miles away, in Medway, "because they know him in Margate".

The same probably couldn't be said these days of Watt-Ruffell's boss at the security firm, former fellow Tory councillor Stephen Broadhurst. He was forced to resign after it was discovered that he spent most of his time 5,000 miles away in Panama "on business", and had the lowest attendance record of any Thanet council member. Broadhurst, who continued to trouser his annual allowance of £4352.79, had even managed to "sign in" to a council meeting from across the Atlantic, although this was later put down by the council to an "administrative error".

Surely coincidence, then, that Broadhurst's initial resignation letter was rejected because someone else had signed it on his behalf.

● **DISTURBING evidence that parish councils may be going down the same route as some of their big city counterparts. A minute of a meeting of Birlingham parish council in Worcestershire records that, following a discussion on ways to speed up the decision-making process, "the clerk would investigate and ask if the 'brown envelope' method (used by the planning group) was something that could be used ... in order to prevent delays." Better not – Gnome is watching.**

HICK JOKE

INDEPENDENT councillor Graeme Hicks, Cornwall council's cabinet member for highways, transport and planning, is noted for his shy charm and winning ways.

Last year, as a Kerrier district councillor and member of the Devon and Cornwall police authority, he upset some of his constituents by calling them "scumbags". A Standards Board investigation concluded that he should be allowed to carry on "serving" on the police authority. Hicks repaid this leniency by attending just two meetings during the year, while claiming his full annual allowance of £9,295.64 – equivalent to an hourly rate of £2,323.91.

Despite having been a vociferous opponent of proposals to turn Cornwall into a "unitary" authority, when it was agreed that it would be so from April this year, Hicks changed his mind and got elected.

As the new council's transport supremo, one of Hicks' first tasks was to handle controversial plans for a new multi-million pound Scillies ferry terminal which protesters say will destroy the historic and picturesque harbour area of Penzance. The monstrous scheme is backed by the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly councils and that noted environmental and architectural vandal Prince Charles, wearing his Duke of Cornwall hat.

With local opposition running at around 90 percent, Hicks was invited to attend a public meeting to hear the arguments. Although the hall could only hold 400 people, nearly 600 squeezed in. Hicks, already having decided the development was a good idea, declared the meeting "hot air" and didn't bother going. That's the way to do it!

OLDHAM TIGHT

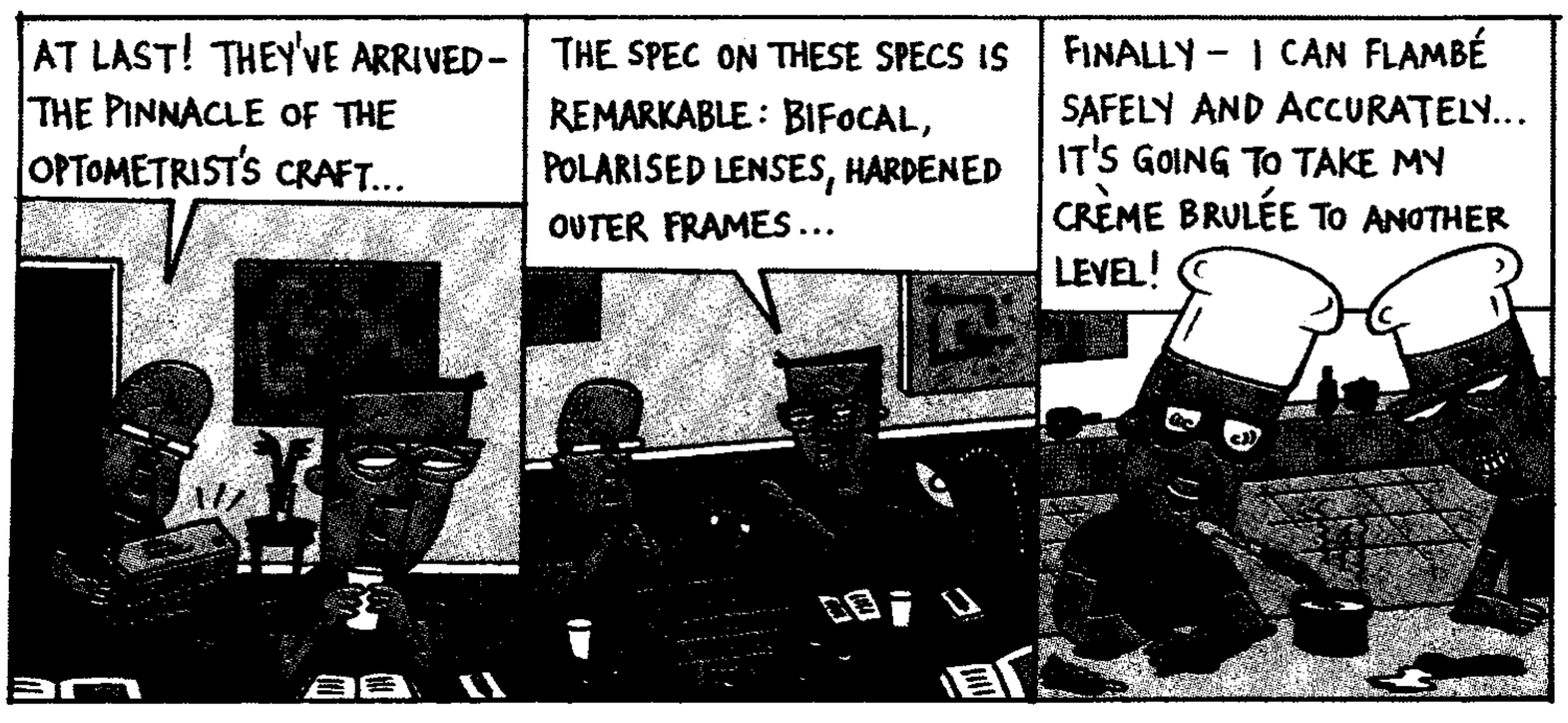
"OH NO, we wouldn't do something like that," Oldham council's PR supremo, Peter Murphy, told the Eye confidently when we rang to ask why the council was withdrawing discretionary rate relief from nine local charities including shops run by Age Concern, the British Heart Foundation and a local hospice for the dying, Dr Kershaw's, which alone stood to lose £8,000 a year. The Eye must have been given a bum steer, Murphy said – but he'd check anyway and come back to us.

Come back he did, a few hours later, with a statement announcing that, er, the Lib Dem council had indeed taken such a decision, but it was an "administrative error" and would be reversed. Hurrah – another victory for Lord Gnome!

But hang on. How could it have been an "administrative error", we asked – the letter received by Dr Kershaw's from the council's rates department having stated "I regret to inform you... the committee refused your application for relief". A council committee may make a stupid or ill-judged decision – but it is still a decision. Ah, said Mr Murphy, it wasn't really taken by a committee at all, but by a junior officer using "delegated powers".

So the council informs those affected that a decision on a sensitive matter involving thousands of pounds has been made by elected councillors, when in fact it has been made on the whim of the office junior. How reassuring.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON KNIFE & PACKER


AT LAST! THEY'VE ARRIVED – THE PINNACLE OF THE OPTOMETRIST'S CRAFT...
THE SPEC ON THESE SPECS IS REMARKABLE: BIFOCAL, POLARISED LENSES, HARDENED OUTER FRAMES...
FINALLY – I CAN FLAMBÉ SAFELY AND ACCURATELY... IT'S GOING TO TAKE MY CRÈME BRULÉE TO ANOTHER LEVEL!

NOOKS and CORNERS

THE proposal to build a large hotel and other accommodation on the south bank of the Thames opposite Hampton Court Palace was described by David Starkey as not only "a national scandal but an international scandal" (*Eyes 1033 & 1231*).

Yet despite the opposition of Historic Royal Palaces (HRP) and the vigorous campaign of the Hampton Court Rescue Campaign, Elmbridge borough council gave planning permission for the latest scheme in June, after the developer, Gladeale, agreed to pay £3m as "planning gain" under a section 106 agreement.

The hotel is to be built in front of the railway station, designed in a rather more tactful Tudor style by Sir William Tite in 1849. Flats and accommodation for the Star & Garter Home are also proposed on the former railway land at the side of the station – part of a flood plain which last flooded only six years ago.

But there is still hope. A legal challenge has been launched by Keith Garner, an independent architect who once acted as a consultant to Historic Royal Palaces. He went to the high court when he found HRP was not planning to bring a legal challenge despite the effect this gratuitous development will have on the setting of the Tudor palace.

Garner claims Elmbridge council failed properly to consider the impact of the scheme on Hampton Court Palace and failed to follow procedures regarding flood protection. He also argues that the hotel site, once occupied by a long-derelict pub called the *Jolly Boatman*, should be landscaped as an open space and that any new development should be further west.

So controversial a scheme should, of course, have been called in for public inquiry. HRP asked for one, but was not supported by English Heritage which performed one of its now familiar *voltes-face* and failed to oppose the development last year, although five years earlier the chief executive, Simon Thurley, rightly called for the site to be acquired by public subscription and landscaped. (CABE, needless to say, is in favour of anything new.) Ian Taylor, the local Tory MP for Esher and Walton, wrote to the then secretary of state for communities and local government, Hazel Blears, urging her not to call in the application. (Mr Taylor, incidentally, is standing down following the revelation that he claimed £23,000 for a second home in central London which was used for business purposes and by his son).

The involvement of the Star & Garter Home also helped ease the grant of planning permission, although questions still need to be answered about the unpopular decision to abandon its magnificent purpose-built home on Richmond Hill and to move disabled servicemen to a site liable to flooding (*Eye* 1230).

And then there is the architecture. The first design for the hotel was by Allies & Morrison, but they were dropped in favour of Quinlan & Francis Terry who propose something tasteful and Georgian. There was hope that Francis Terry might be a more interesting architect than his father, who has made a lucrative career producing inept and derivative Palladian mansions for millionaires. But the design for Hampton Court suggests otherwise.

The Quinlan & Francis Terry proposal

Here was an opportunity to design a grand Classical front facing the Thames, to vie with Wren's additions to the palace. The Queen's Hotel at Cheltenham or the Regent Hotel at Leamington Spa come to mind. But no: all Terry *père et fils* can come up with is a brick façade like a terrace of ordinary Georgian houses, articulated not with pilasters but by prominent down pipes. The design is pedestrian, unimaginative and crass. It should not be built.

ALTHOUGH the city they misgovern is home to the National Museum of Photography, Film & Television and has been declared the "City of Film" by UNESCO, the party political dinosaurs who control Bradford metropolitan district council are determined to demolish the Odeon, one of the last Art Deco supercinemas in Britain (Eye 1217). This is despite strong public opposition – 2,000 letters of objection were sent in but somehow mislaid – and the campaign by BORG (the Bradford Odeon Rescue Group).

The cinema is now in the neglectful hands of Yorkshire Forward, a regional development agency based in Leeds, which wants to build a shopping centre and offices on the site. The council claims no other buyer could be found, but when BORG found one who was ready to pay £3m, the offer was declined. Other lies told by the council include the presence of asbestos in the building, which has been used to keep people out; yet the asbestos was removed in the 1980s.

On 23 September the seven councillors charged with deciding the building's future had a tour of it and were minded to vote 5-2 to keep it. Then a solicitor told them how much it would cost if a thwarted Yorkshire Forward were to sue. They then voted 4-3 in favour of demolition. Yorkshire Forward subsequently says it would not have sued.

The people of Bradford have been betrayed by their council (again), and by English Heritage, which has U-turned over the merits of the Odeon [Eye 1242]. In protest Bradfordians have no option but to take to the streets (which they did last month) and to the internet (see www.savetheoden.wordpress.com).

'Piloti'

"Feet, dogs. Gwan big it up for Missy Q"

NEWS FROM THE OFFICERS' MESS

THE growing number of senior ranks in all the services in relation to the numbers of enlisted personnel serving "at the tip of the spear" is not good news as the defence budget comes under increased scrutiny.

In 2007, the army discovered that there were nearly 1,000 more officers on the payroll than required for effective duties: movement upward through the ranks due to promotion had continued despite steady shrinkage in the numbers of "other ranks" available for them to command.

That movement shows no sign of slowing down. The latest available figures for regular armed forces requirements, announced this month in the Commons by armed forces minister Bill Rammell, reveal that the army has 90 more generals, lieutenant generals, major generals, brigadiers and colonels than required.

Things are no better at sea where the Royal Navy has a surfeit of 80 admirals, vice admirals, rear admirals and commodores identified as "surplus to requirements". Considering the navy's grand total of 88 commissioned ships in service, this top-heavy brass superstructure could lead to an imminent capsize.

Meanwhile in the air – or rather on the ground behind various desks – the RAF is supporting a splendid of 160 air marshals, air vice marshals, air commodores and group captains.

It's not entirely clear what these senior officers do. If they are surplus to the requirement laid down by the MoD, it's probably not very much.

Meanwhile the number of experienced NCOs with a couple of tours of duty under their belts, long regarded as the backbone of the British army, continues to dwindle, thanks to the strain of extended duties, pisspoor pay and the lure of opportunities in civvy street.

It's not difficult to see why the Treasury has – so far – put up with this. The last thing that Gordon Brown needs is another collection of disgruntled, suddenly unemployed senior officers adding to the chorus of disapproval regarding defence procurement, or other strategic and tactical failures. Better to keep them quiet behind their desks.

'Squarebasher'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

It all sounds very exciting!
I wouldn't go that far.
ART NEWSPAPER
NOTTINGHAM CONTEMPORARY, BRITAIN'S NEWEST ART GALLERY, OPENS WITH MARVELLOUS SHOW OF EARLY HOCKNEY.
No, nor would I. Near Liverpool, isn't it?
Even further, I think.

NUMBER CRUNCHING

1 Countries out of 27 in EU that got to vote on Lisbon Treaty creating role of new EU high representative

0 People out of 500m in European Union who have ever got to vote for Baroness Ashton to do anything

Letters

Ha! ha!

DEAR MR MISLOP

EYE 1249 WAS SUPERB. ALL FOUR COVER JOKES WOULD HAVE BEATEN YOUR AVERAGE COVER. THE CONTENTS WERE FUNNY AND SHARPLY SATIRICAL. BUT THEN I GOT TO LIGGER AND COULDN'T READ A BLOODY WORD. SHAME REALLY.

DES CUSTARD
TUNBRIDGE WELLS

● Apologies for misaligning the Celeb speech bubbles in last issue. Ed.

Horror mask

Sir,

We attached your free gift mask (Eye, 1248) to our bonfire night guy; so although we were subsequently unable to store it in our dressing-up box, we still feel it represented excellent value.

THE GARNADE FAMILY,

Via email.

Judgment day

Sir,

Your article re: PEN and their recommendations for libel reformation (Street of Shame, Eye 1249) mistakenly states that the Brunswick rule "allows foreign claimants to sue in London even if they only have negligible interests in England".

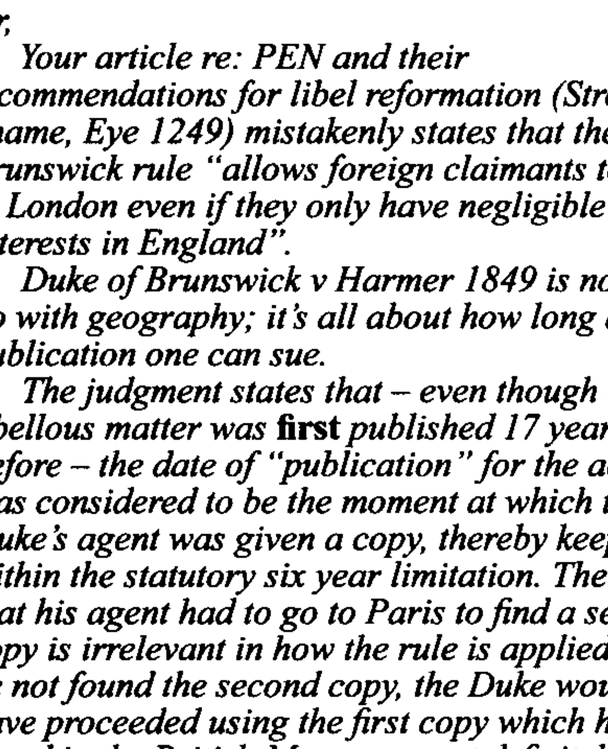
Duke of Brunswick v Harmer 1849 is nowt to do with geography; it's all about how long after publication one can sue.

The judgment states that – even though the libellous matter was **first** *published 17 years before – the date of "publication" for the action was considered to be the moment at which the Duke's agent was given a copy, thereby keeping within the statutory six year limitation. The fact that his agent had to go to Paris to find a second copy is irrelevant in how the rule is applied. Had he not found the second copy, the Duke would still have proceeded using the first copy which he found in the British Museum, most definitely in England.*

Ta muchly, and enjoying my subscription I got for my birthday far too much to be bothered to cancel.

Yours faithfully,
STEVE,

Surrey.



"We don't sell religious cards, only Christmas cards"

All hot air?

Sir,

Re the Climate change cartoon p10, Eye 1249.

I liked your "deniers" cartoon, though perhaps the arrows should be from all directions. Deniers (among whom I belong) are from not just the USA, but New Zealand, Australia, India, China, Russia, France, Denmark, Norway, Sweden to name but nine.

We are not sceptics; that would suggest there is an a priori case to be sceptical of – but there isn't. Watch out for "The Copenhagen Climate Challenge" coming to a government near you.

Yours faithfully,
REV PHILIP FOSTER MA,

Cambridgeshire.

Science lecture

Sir,

Re St Wilfrid's, Harrowgate.

I was disappointed to read that Piloti (Eye 1249) has reinforced the incorrect view that magnetic fields from electricity substations are a danger to health. There is no scientific evidence to link electricity substations with an increase of ill health. Piloti's use of the specific term "radiation" only reinforces people's prejudices against such structures. EM radiation covers everything from radio waves to X-Rays and beyond, and does nothing to describe what is actually emitted. Should your excellent staff of humanities graduates want to further their knowledge I point you in the direction of: http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/Risk/magnetic-fields

I shall, however, not be cancelling my subscription for this minor transgression.

Yours,
IAN PARISH,

Eccles, Kent.

Lookalike

Woody

Beke

Sir,

I know Anton Du Beke has been a bit controversial recently, but credit where it's due, he was brilliant as Woody in the Toy Story films.

Yours,
MIKE NAYLOR,

Via email.

Class war

Sir,

Apparently David Blunkett is "mystified" (HP Sauce Eye 1249) that, under Sir Christopher Kelly's rules, if a civil servant accompanies an MP back to his constituency, "the MP and the civil servant get into the first-class carriage, waving farewell to the MP's partner who must travel in standard class".

Mr Blunkett and his colleagues should, of course, be allowed to sit on a train with family members. I confess that I was not hitherto aware of Sir Christopher's proposal to make it illegal for an MP to travel with his, or her, partner in standard class. No such draconian measure should be contemplated.

Yours sincerely,
COLIN MACDONALD,

Nottingham.

Scenes You Seldom See

"This is all very personal, Andrew. I have no intention of discussing it on my mobile in public"

Haiku what a scorcher

Sir,

Blair's Brussels boss bid
Fades and falls like autumn leaves
So much for high coup

BEN DRAKE,

Via email.

Don't care homes

Sir,

Re Ghosting out – the letter from Junior Knacker (Eye 1248).

So prisons, schools and now police stations are adept at smoothing things over during inspections. Add care homes to the list.

We always knew when inspections were due as the soiled perma-stained bedding which staff constantly complain about suddenly disappeared to be replaced by crisp new white linen.

Then we received vast deliveries of cleaning materials and toiletries. Wet wipes, aprons, gloves, disinfectant, new towels and toothbrushes, the sort of things we'd ask for all year.

Any staff member who might have spoken out of line was given "leave of absence" or sent on some unnecessary training awayday, or else had their rota mysteriously altered for "operational reasons" thus ensuring the inspectors only met those who were on message.

The menu was changed as well, so that a slightly more upmarket version of the usual slop was served.

Ahh, the caring care profession.

EX-CARE HOME WORKER.

A librarian writes....

Sir,

Why are liberal intellectuals so obsessed with the number of books in public libraries (Bookworm, Eye 1249)? Public libraries may be primarily a book-lending service, but they are also (and always have been) an information service, an education service, a social service, a creche, a labour exchange and a drop-in centre for the unemployed and the unemployable.

In my experience as a professional librarian, many public libraries are (or were) crammed with out-of-date books which nobody wanted to borrow. I spent a large proportion of my career weeding out this dead wood, so the customers could get at the good stuff.

The internet is an essential information tool; and computers also allow customers without their own machines to type their own cvs and other important documents. Yes they have displaced some of the books in many libraries, but maybe that's not such a bad thing.

PATRICK BROWNE,

Via email.

Pedantry corner

...Loved your "Brown Jogging'"Cover (Eye 1249). May I not be the first to pedantically point out that it's "Lord'"Mandelson rather than "Mr" these days. Lord M is an unelected senior member of the present unelectable government.

Whilst in Pedant mode, I must point out that Jonny Wilkinson was an England rugby player and therefore the English flag would have been the suitable background to the Pseuds Corner item illustration on p27 of the same edition of your esteemed organ rather than the Union flag.

JON SIMONS

...The translator of Herman Van Rompuy's Haiku (Eye 1249, p 20) should be sacked for committing the grave error (in Belgian eyes) of confusing the French-speaking Walloons with the Dutch-speaking Flemish. Mr Van Rompuy is Flemish. It's entirely possible that he writes his Haiku in Walloon as a fraternal gesture to his Francophone compatriots. But I bet he doesn't.

ANDREW GRAYDON

...("Bold Macdonald", Eye 1249) Macquarie does not own a big slice of the M6 motorway, which is a part of the small residue of public assets. It owns a large slice of the M6 toll motorway. I know, I should get out more.

MARTIN EDWARDS

...Re: cartoon on p6. It's flotsam. If it were jetsam it would have washed up on the beach already.

CLAIRE WEBSTER

...Cyclops is slipping. The clue to 10 Across in Crossword 404 should surely end with "fat kids", not "fat kid", since the answer, "Cherubim", is a plural. Now I feel better for missing 403.

DONALD A. GILLIES

Slicker KO'd

Sir,

Slicker (In the City, Eye 1249) really should get his facts right when writing about [boxer] David Haye's tax status. Far from it being necessary to remain "outside the UK for 90 days each tax year" to qualify as non-resident it is, in fact, a necessity to spend **no more than 90 days in** *the UK to qualify. From and including the tax year 2008/9 this has been further restricted to 90 midnights, which stops you arriving on Tuesday and leaving on Wednesday and never being present for a whole tax day.*

Yours,
TONY TILLIN,

Mallorca, and counting.

● Whoops, quite right. Ed.

Eye Spy

Sir,

Re Books and Bookmen, Eye 1249.

Interesting piece on Ben Mcintyre. His next book, and I will happily pay him a fiver if I'm wrong, is about MI5 agent runner Maxwell Knight.

PHIL TOMASELLI,

Via email.

Photo opportunity

Sir,

Given the likelihood that the upcoming Copenhagen climate talks will fail to agree on a meaningful mechanism for carbon emission reduction, and the colossal intergenerational theft that this will imply, I wonder if you have any photos in your archives which illustrate how the older generation might try to make up to the younger generation in an increasingly warm world?

Yours etc.
SIMON WOOD,

Via email.

Frosty reception

Sir,

The conferral of an honorary degree on Sir David Frost by the former M3 Polytechnic (Eye 1249) reminded me of Frost's memorable interview with the Pope, which was originally recorded on floppy vinyl by Private Eye on 8 December 1967. As I recall, the Pope initially welcomed the television inquisitor with the words "Salute Frostica", but later told him, testily,to "Pissofficus Frosticus".

Salutamus Private Eye.
DAVID WHITE,

Via email.

Save the trees

Sir,

Ad Nauseum made a very good point in Eye1248 about direct marketing. All this chopping down trees to turn into paper to sell stuff must be wrong.

Sincerely,
JOHN McANDREW,

Herts.

PS. Very disappointed that you only used 22 of the 40 pages in this issue for all those lovely ads. Please use more of your organ to tell me about investment trusts, christmas cards, HiFi and watches. Far more fascinating than the news and comment for which I pay £1.50p

Lookalike

Kirsty

Monica

Sir,

I always wondered (not really) what happened to Monica Lewinsky... now I realise she's been on our TV screens for years, bossing that bald chap around, and telling people what houses they should buy, calling them all sorts when they don't like her suggestions.

She's really mastered the posh accent too..

SHARON DUNCAN,

Edinburgh.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"He had a winner at the Curragh yesterday, that's the Newmarket of France."
DEREK THOMPSON, Talksport
(Frank Carvill)

"You can literally get a world on your plate."
JAMIE OLIVER, Channel 4
(John Anderson)

"11am heralded 2 minutes silence that was echoed all over the country..."
BBC Radio 4
(Brian Smith)

"They (Northwich Victoria) are rattling a few of Charlton's feathers."
ANDY TOWNSEND, ITV Sport
(Stephen Baker)

"From when I was a baby, I said I would be the heavyweight world champion."
DAVID HAYE, BBC Sport website
(Simon Neal)

"He says none of his friends have any friends either"

Pseudo Names

... I protest at the grossly distasteful cover of issue 1248 of your magazine. Some of us in this country know a potential leader of real stature when we see one.

C. KYLE.

... As French lavatory attendants, we've been entertained by a spate of graffiti on the walls of our esteemed establishment here in Paris. We've a suspicion that it is inspired by your esteemed magazine.

B DAY
P SOIR.

... If I get a pseudonymous letter published by the Eye does that mean I join an elite club?

OLLIE GARKY.

... I see that you are once again planning to wind up the Pseudo Names feature. May I ask you to reconsider, as for my part, I have always found them to be exceedingly good.

MR KIP LING.

... You're not REALLY doing to end the pseudo names, are you? Our miserable callcentre-type office will never smile again.

RAY DIOFOR
WOMA N'SOUAH
R. KYVEOUR
EUAN YAWS
E. NOUR-TYME.

... It would be a fitting end to the Pseudo Names feature if you were to arrange a meeting for all of the contributors.

RON DAYVOO.

... Don't be ashamed of your Pseudo Names feature. People have been making up funny names since the creation and will continue to do so until the Last Judgement.

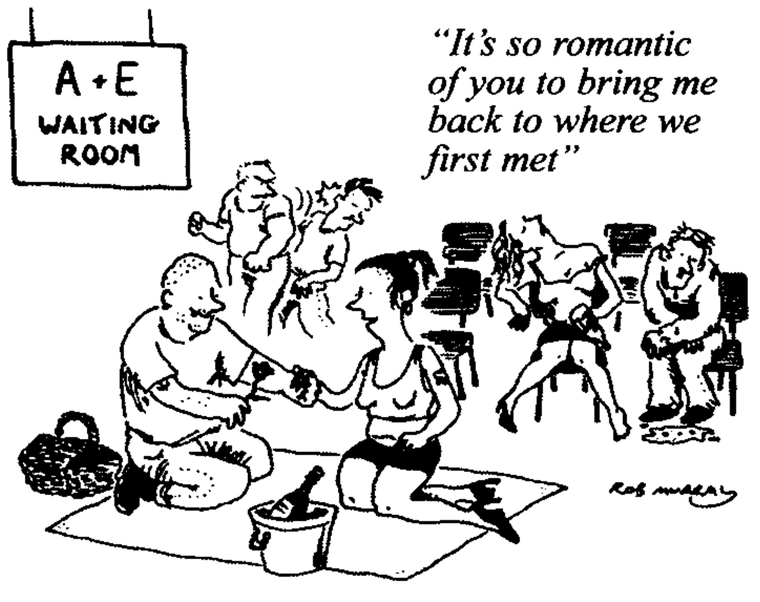
JENNY SIS
REV. L. A. SHUN.

... I hope you don't end this column. I've quite a soft spot for it.

PETE BOGG.

... You could at least continue through the festive season...

JUAN SINROYLE
DAVID SEETY
STU DALOWLY
CAT ULSHED.



"It's so romantic of you to bring me back to where we first met"

Letter from **Kampala**

from Our Own Correspondent

JERRY LANIER, America's new ambassador, arrived here in Kampala in the second week of September, just in time to catch three days of riots. Welcome to Uganda.

Not so long ago our country was regarded as being at the centre of an African renaissance, built on democracy and transparency. But Yoweri Museveni, our president since 1986 and once the poster boy of enlightened African leadership, has long since lost his shine.

The riots, which pitted President Museveni's government against the king of the largest tribe, the Baganda, saw 27 people shot dead in and around Kampala, more than 600 arrested and at least five radio stations shut down.

It's no coincidence that our once great leader appears to grow more paranoid with each passing year. His motorcade now numbers up to 21 cars, including battle wagons, heavily armed soldiers from his 10,000-man Presidential Guard Brigade, a signal jamming vehicle that looks like a bullion van, and two hefty briefcases to protect him from chemical and biological weapons. The cases, which weigh close to 20 kilograms each, are lugged behind him by two of his beefcakes.

With less than two years to the next election, our donor friends, who fund more than 30 percent of the annual budget, are under pressure to speak out more on democracy and governance issues. This is easier said than done. The British ambassador in Kampala, Martin Shearman, wrote a watery piece on democracy in a local newspaper. But the diplomatic corps has little appetite to take on Museveni directly.

Quite by coincidence, we have discovered oil in Uganda's western province where Heritage and Tullow Oil have exploration licences. American, European and Middle-East companies are all eyeing exploitation contracts, and anxiously look over their shoulders at our new Chinese friends who, with their bucket loads of cash and indifference to local political practices, are also interested.

The Americans, in particular, are in a tight spot. Johnnie Carson, the assistant secretary of state for Africa at the US state department, has been very critical of Museveni's undemocratic ways. But we are only one of two countries, the other being tiny Burundi, that have deployed peacekeepers in Somalia. Although the mission there is run under the aegis of the African Union, everyone knows that Museveni is helping the Americans fight their dirty war against the Somali insurgent group, Al Shahaab.

With the spectre of renewed violence hanging over Southern Sudan when it holds its referendum next year on whether to secede, and the blood stains yet to be cleaned up in neighbouring Kenya following the post-election violence there two years ago, our president's regional influence has never been greater. In case the Americans needed any reminding, Museveni has been careful to flirt with Iran's President Ahmedinejad and even the North Koreans.

The Americans have chosen to play carrot-and-stick with our gay-hating leader. They refused to let him meet President Obama during the UN General Assembly in New York in September; but Johnny Carson turned up in Kampala in October, met Museveni and announced $250m in new aid. Although the US state department official also met leaders of the opposition, the strong criticism of the Ugandan government they had expected was not forthcoming.

Museveni, meanwhile, continues to press his advantage. He desperately needs a one-on-one meeting with President Obama for the photo-op and to get assurances that the soft policy he enjoyed under George W Bush will continue. Our great liberator recently upset the Norwegian government when he cancelled a trip to Oslo at the last minute. Museveni, who has another trip to Denmark scheduled in December, wants to stop-over in Oslo around the time President Obama will there to receive the Nobel peace prize.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "I started this career by accident," Ryuichi Ichinokawa told reporters at his Hagemashi Tai agency in Tokyo, "when a friend asked me to pretend to be his father, and make a speech at his wedding. My speech went down well, and I realised there was a need for professional stand-ins at social events. So I set up this agency, and requests came flooding in from people who wanted to hire me as their stand-in father, uncle, boss, boyfriend and, in one case, girlfriend. I always prepare carefully for every role, so if I'm pretending to be somebody's husband, I make sure I know everything about my 'wife', from her mobile phone number to what 'our' kids have been doing lately. In three and a half years, I have hardly ever been caught out."

Hagemashi Tai [I Want To Cheer You Up] is one of several rent-a-friend agencies in Japan, which together employ over one thousand agents. "We're often asked to provide stand-in parents for a woman who is attending a match-making party, or a father for a boy who is in trouble at school. Recently, there has been a surge in demand for bogus bosses to make speeches at parties. These are mostly hired by men who have lost their jobs. Last weekend, I was the father of a twelve-year-old boy and his younger sister at their sports day. I cheered them on, video-recorded their races, and joined in the adult-and-child events. Their mother had recently divorced, and the children were being bullied and being called bastards because of their absent father. So she hired me. I am quite muscular, and my appearance put an end to the bullying." *(Thaindian News, 21/09/09. Spotter: Nick Barlow)*

– ● –

● **"How to avoid an earthquake urgently when you are woke up with a start from a deep sleep?**

If an earthquake occurs at night, and you are woke up with a start from a deep sleep, please do not be flurried! Hide under some solid furniture such as writing desk, bed, and so on, or hide into a small-span toilet with newspaper on head. Don't run to balcony! Avoid jumping from a window or a building by all means. This will cause pain. Locations of avoiding earthquake: under solid and securable articles, places easily forming triangle space, and ones with a small span and supports.

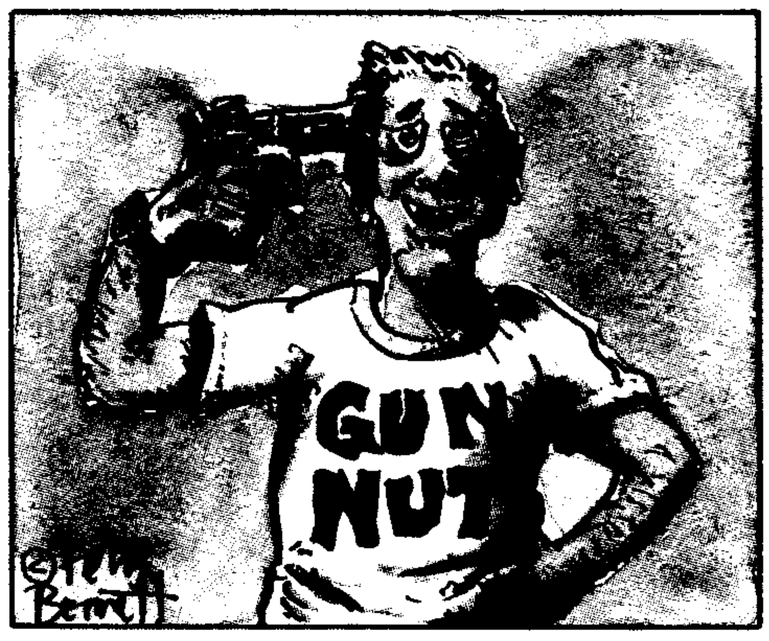
How to avoid an earthquake urgently when at restaurants and amusement parks of a hotel?

If you are in a restaurant, you can squat down on the spot or grovel under a table, but when you grovel, make sure to keep away from hanging objects like electric fans. Grovel if you are in a karaoke bar, squat down on the spot. Or grovel beside a solid counter, and use newspaper or other things to protect your head. Keep away from high and unstable goods like hat stands, or shelves with heavy or fragile salted goods on them. After the shake stops, you must continue to grovel, then withdraw from safety passage orderly."

(Guidelines issued by Earthquake Administration of Yunnan Province. Spotter: Barry Fantoni)

– ● –

● "James Looney was a firearms enthusiast," sheriff Dave Marshak told a press conference in Jefferson County, "who liked to teach people how to safely handle firearms. Yesterday, he

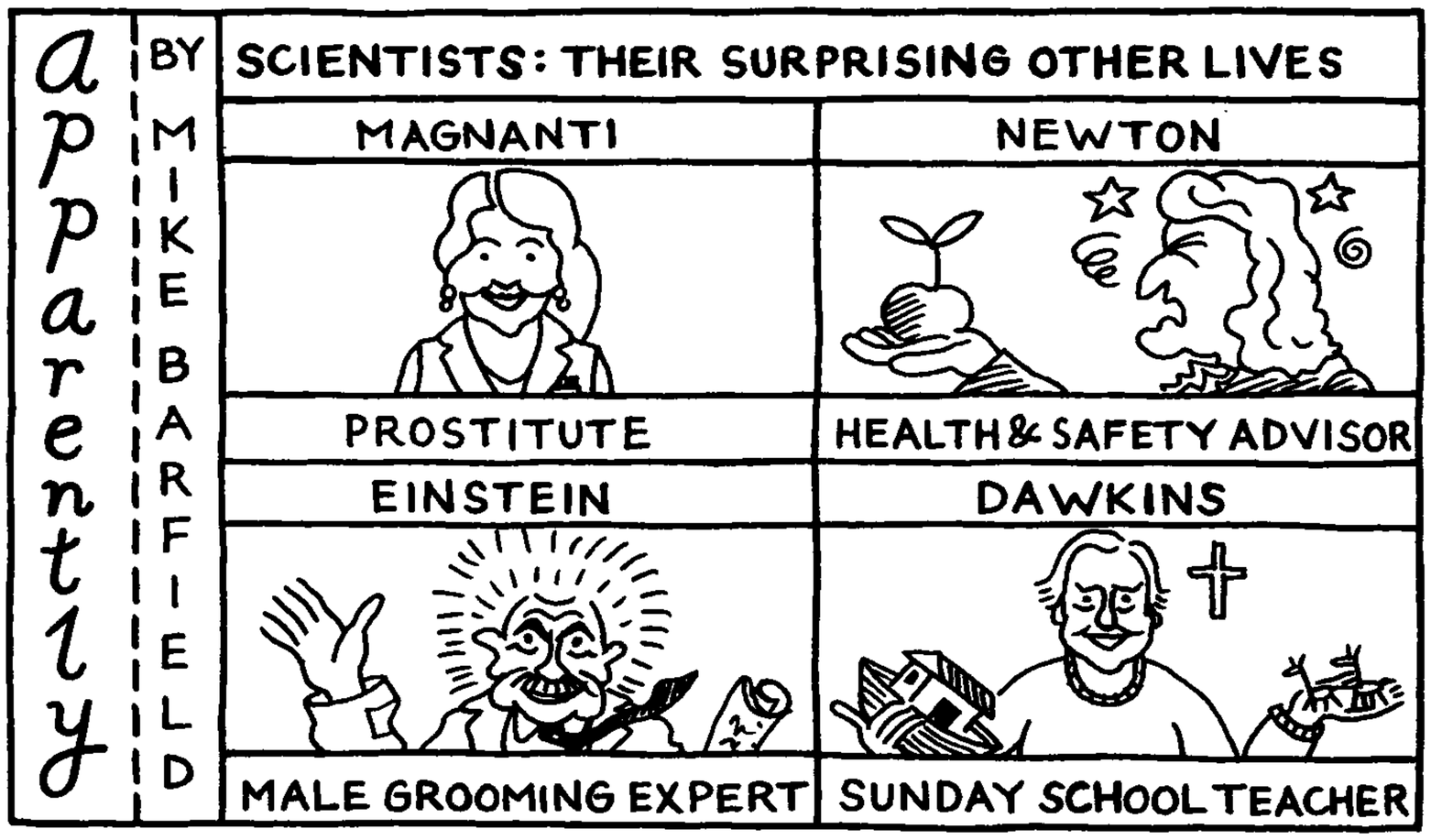


was demonstrating the safety mechanisms on several guns by holding them to his head and asking his girlfriend, Kim Thompson, if it was safe to pull the trigger. She had to guess whether the gun would fire or not. Apparently, the last one did."

Earlier, Kim Thompson had said "I am confused by all this. I am under the impression that he expected all the guns to be empty. But the last one was not empty. He only had the guns because he wanted to protect us. Just before he shot himself, he was the happiest I had ever seen him."

Sheriff Marshak added "Rule number one in any safety class is, never point a gun at anything you don't want to injure or kill. Mr Looney forgot that. We believe alcohol may have been involved in the accident."

(St Louis Post-Dispatch, 22/09/2009. Spotter: Hugh Macdonald)



PRIME MINISTERIAL DECREE NO. 58

From the Throne of Comrade Her Majesty The Queen

(Speechwriter By Appointment To The Supreme Leader)

Comrade Citizens,

My Comrade Husband and I are delighted to have been given the opportunity to read out the Supreme Leader's Five Year Plan for making Britain the most successful, prosperous and happy country in the entire world.

The Supreme Leader's government will enact measures to ensure the following:

- A complete end to poverty by 2020.
- Old comrades to be given 24-hour care in their own homes by teams of qualified doctors and nurses working round the clock to keep them alive until they are 150.
- Every child in Britain will go to Oxford or Cambridge and will receive a first-class degree in the subject of their choice – entirely free.
- All children to receive one-to-one tuition from the age of two to 18 by state-registered paedophiles recruited from the private sector to ensure that the highest standards are maintained.
- Free legal aid to enable parents to sue for compensation should any of the above educational reforms fail to give complete satisfaction to parents, foster parents, live-in partners, woman next door who looks after the kids while you're out having some "me time", etc.
- All crime to be abolished by 2015.
- Bonuses to bankers to be outlawed on pain of death. In future they are to be allowed to work only for the minimum wage of £6.50 an hour.
- All Comrades will be issued with a planet-saving "green" kit, to include a free wind turbine, free loft insulation, an electric car, a TV set with no stand-by facility and a packet of grow-your-own palm oil seeds to create biofuels in your own garden or window box (not provided).
- A measure to reduce the national debt to zero by 2012, and to prohibit any future government from borrowing huge amounts of money and spending even more on ridiculous vote-winning schemes, such as we can expect from the next government when it takes office in 6 months' time. *(Don't read this bit out. G.B.)*
- As part of the Supreme Leader's programme of measures to control climate change, we will ensure that the weather in future will be nice and warm (but not too warm, obviously!) and there will be no more floods, blizzards, gale force winds or leaves on the line ever again.

Thank you very much for listening and may I wish you all a very Happy Christmas.

The Supreme Leader writes:

I have nothing to add to this superb summary. I could not have put it better myself.

Gordon Brown

The Supreme Leader

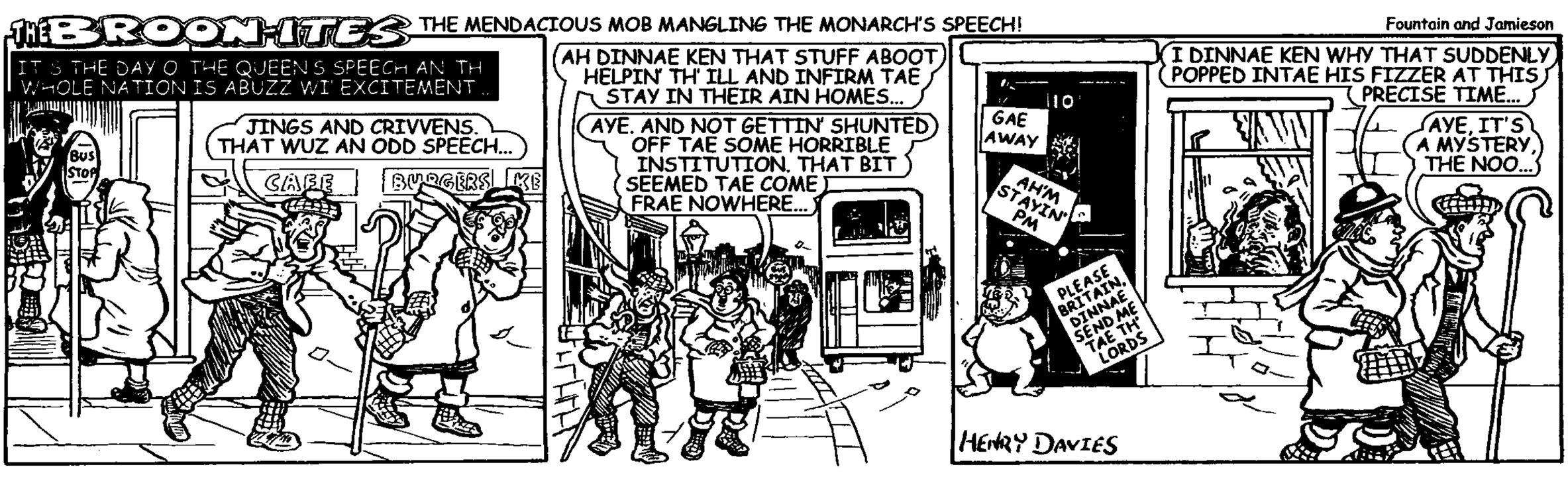
Enemy of the People No. 94

Comrade Murdoch

History contains no more loathsome and repulsive example of personal treachery than the villainous, backstabbing of the Supreme Leader by the poisonous toad Rupert Murdoch. This viperous and senile hate-monger, with pus and bile seeping from every pore, was once a champion of the Supreme Leader's Age of Change. I myself was good enough to give up a whole half-hour of my valuable time to attend the wedding of Mr Murdoch's chief lickspittle, Comrade Rebekah Filth, to show my approval of Mr Murdoch's repulsive activities through such gutter outlets as the Sun, the News of the World, the Times and Sky TV.

And what was my reward for this magnanimous gesture? To find that Mr Murdoch has defected to the Cameronite-Bullingdonian-Osbornist reactionary claque. And for why? Because he has concocted a shameless and utterly cynical pact whereby when the Cameronite claque comes to power it will abolish the People's BBC, thus giving the traitor Murdoch a monopoly of the airwaves, to spread his evil web of filth and lies in the home of every Comrade in the land. (Not, of course, that Comrade Cameron is going to win, thanks to the good sense of the British people, whom I have every confidence will next June be confirming the Supreme Leader in power by a 99.9 percent majority, similar to that recently enjoyed by our dear friend and ally Comrade President Karzai of the People's Non-Democratic Republic of Afghanistan.)

Is it time for my Bonkerzapam yet, Comrade Nurse? G.B.


THE BROON-ITES
THE MENDACIOUS MOB MANGLING THE MONARCH'S SPEECH!
Fountain and Jamieson
IT'S THE DAY O' THE QUEEN'S SPEECH AN' TH WHOLE NATION IS ABUZZ WI' EXCITEMENT..
JINGS AND CRIVVENS. THAT WUZ AN ODD SPEECH...
BUS STOP
CAFE
BURGERS
AH DINNAE KEN THAT STUFF ABOOT HELPIN' TH' ILL AND INFIRM TAE STAY IN THEIR AIN HOMES...
AYE. AND NOT GETTIN' SHUNTED OFF TAE SOME HORRIBLE INSTITUTION. THAT BIT SEEMED TAE COME FRAE NOWHERE...
I DINNAE KEN WHY THAT SUDDENLY POPPED INTAE HIS FIZZER AT THIS PRECISE TIME...
AYE, IT'S A MYSTERY, THE NOO...
10
GAE AWAY
AH'M STAYIN' PM
PLEASE BRITAIN, DINNAE SEND ME TAE TH' LORDS
HENRY DAVIES

'NO WHITEWASH' PROMISES IRAQ INQUIRY CHIEF

by Our Political Staff **Michael Whitewash**

"MAKE no mistake" said Sir John Didcot-Parkway "this is going to be a really tough no-holds barred investigation into why Tony Blair isn't to blame for the Iraq war"

Sir John told reporters "My colleagues and I are going to get Mr. Blair in front of us (at a time convenient to him obviously since he is a very busy man as we know) and put to him some very searching questions such as:

- would you like some water?
- is there anything you would like to tell us about this war business?
- would you say that it was all President Bush's fault?
- It's almost midday, would you care for some luncheon at my club?"

The other members of the Inquiry were quick to support Sir John's "No Whitewash" message.

Said Baroness Uttar-Rubesh "Mr. Blair can expect no special treatment here apart from the car which we are providing for security purposes and the luncheon which cost a very reasonable £150 a head without wine".

DRAWING ALL FAITHS TOGETHER

Hello to all the Friends of Daft throughout the world!

Many of you have already written to me saying how disappointed you are that I am not to be President of Europe – but hey – let's get one thing straight. **I** never wanted to be.

The only reason my name was put forward was because poor old Gordon Brown, bless him, was desperate for me to sort out the mess he'd made of everything. And he wasn't alone. Everyone in Europe wanted me to take the post.

And sure, I would have made a good job of it. But the truth is I had to say no, I have a full time DAFT job here, bringing all the world's faiths together in peace and love – and that has to take priority doesn't it?

The European Community is all very well but there is a wider community isn't there? The whole world. And do you remember the old hymn that we used to sing at St Albion's? "He's got the whole world in his hands." Well, that's me.

So when you think about it giving the job to a Belgian you've never heard of (no offense, whoever you are!) is a blessing in disguise. It means that I can devote myself to my real calling – saving the world.

And by the way Mr Miliband, you've got **one** thing wrong. I **never** wanted to stop the traffic. I want the traffic to flow, in all lanes, whatever speed we're going and in whatever vehicle – just so long as we are all heading in the same direction. Do you see?

Happy Festive Holiday Winter Break to you all,

Rev. T. Blair

Chief Executive, D.A.F.T.

(former vicar of St. Albion's)

P.S. Should the Europe job become available unexpectedly, if say it doesn't work out with Mr Whatisname, you know that in a very real sense I am always here!

EXCLUSIVE TO ALL TORY PAPERS

GORDON BROWN An Apology

IN RECENT months we may have given the impression that we regarded the next general election as a foregone conclusion. Headlines such as "Brown and Out", "Brown Trousers for Gordon" and "Brown the Toilet" may have reinforced the impression that we thought a Conservative government was a certainty.

We now realise that there was not a jot or scintilla of truth whatsoever in the above and that the reality next year is likely to be a hung parliament, if not an outright victory for Mr Brown and his party.

Our recent headlines such as "The Camerons Aren't Coming", "Not Dave-ing but Drowning" and "Brown Trouser Time for Dave as Tories go Brown the Toilet" will, we hope, have done much to rectify any misunderstanding arising from our previous political coverage.

We would like to apologise to Mr Brown for any embarrassment this may have caused ourselves.

THE Sun SAYS

IT'S THE SUN WOT LOST IT!

THREE weeks ago David Cameron was way ahead in the polls and set for a landslide win in the General Election.

Then your favourite newspaper switched sides and decided to support the Tories!

And before you could say "Dirty Digger" Labour have recovered and the Conservatives are in the doldrums.

And it's all down to your supersoaraway *(Your fired R.M.)*

ITALIAN FASCIST LEADER WAS 'SEX-MAD', DIARIES REVEAL

By Our Italian Facist Leader Correspondent **I.L. Duce**

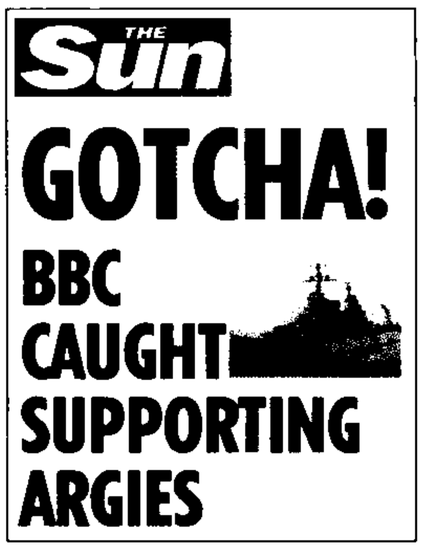
ITALY was rocked to its foundations yesterday by the publication of a set of diaries (authenticated by the late Professor Hugh Trevor Roper) which reveal that the right wing Italian dictator, Silvio Mussolini demanded sex with twenty women a night and that Benito Berlusconi thought of nothing but *(cont. p. 94)*

"May I remind you, it's only supposed to scare off the pigeons"

FORTY YEARS OF THE *SUN*

How Britain's Favourite Newspaper Chronicled The Events That Shaped The World

Man lands on Moon, 1969



Falklands War, 1982

Celebrity madness, 1986

Berlin Wall falls, 1989

First Gulf War, 1990

Death of Diana, 1997

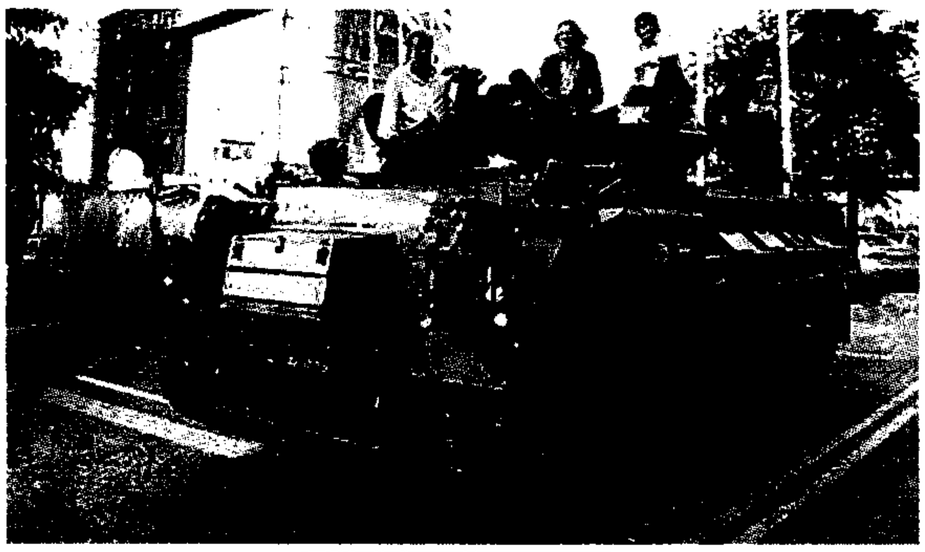
MPs' expenses scandal, 2009

...and what we can look forward to when the Queen dies

Advertisement

JOIN THE ARMY AND BE ON TOP GEAR!

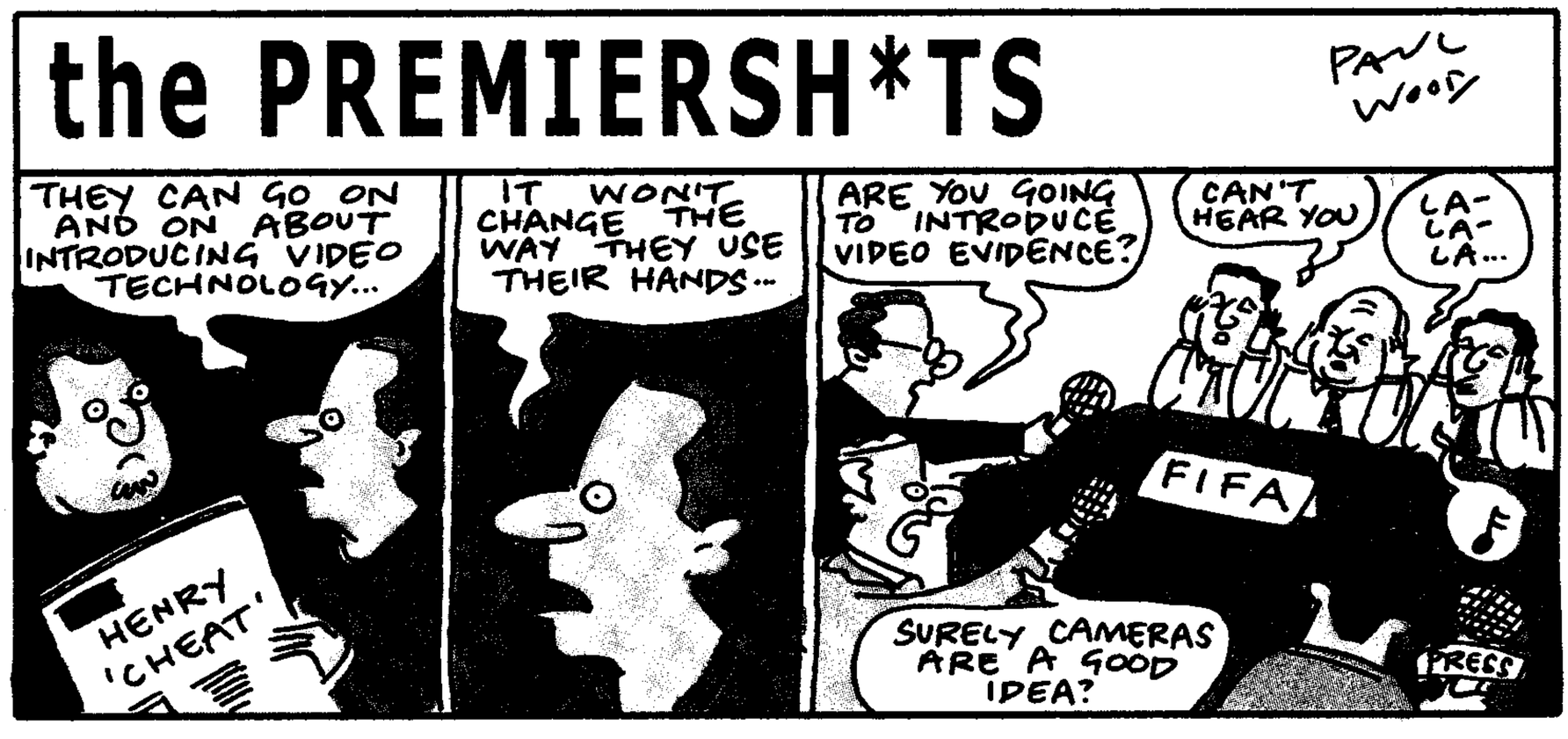
It's not all fighting terrorists and being killed in the British Army of today.
You could be on telly with world-famous stars **Jeremy Clarkson**, **Richard Hammond** and **James May**.
There may not be enough helicopters and armoured vehicles in Iraq or Afghanistan, but when it comes to
Prime Time Television, we're right there!

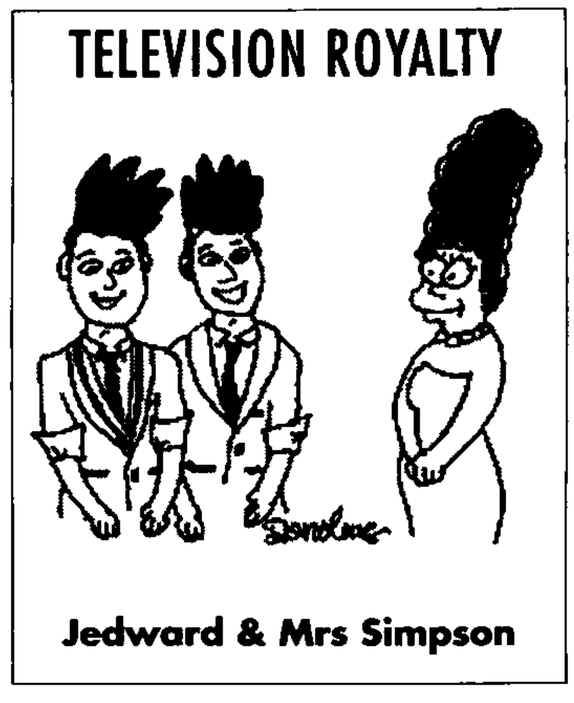


ARMY
BE THE BEST

We've got the Top Gear (but only on telly!)

the PREMIERSH*TS


PAUL WOOD
THEY CAN GO ON AND ON ABOUT INTRODUCING VIDEO TECHNOLOGY...
HENRY 'CHEAT'
IT WON'T CHANGE THE WAY THEY USE THEIR HANDS...
ARE YOU GOING TO INTRODUCE VIDEO EVIDENCE?
CAN'T HEAR YOU
LA-LA-LA...
FIFA
SURELY CAMERAS ARE A GOOD IDEA?
PRESS



News In Brief

LABOUR REELING AFTER BY-ELECTION WIN

LABOUR officials in Scotland were said last night to be reeling after winning a by-election in a safe seat in Glasgow.

"We have a meticulously thought-out strategy of shrugging our shoulders helplessly as we wander into electoral oblivion," said all senior Labour figures, "but this result has holed that strategy completely below the water line."

"What are we supposed to do now?" said a local Labour canvasser, wandering around in a daze. "Celebrate? No one told me that would be a part of my job."

HOME OFFICE SHOCK

THE Home Office last night confirmed that a small number of inmates were spending the evening sleeping in prison cells in a scheme known as "incarceration".

"Clearly, this is a far from ideal situation," admitted one over-crowded prison Governor. "These prisoners expect to be spending their evenings with the rest of J. Wing down the local boozer, not stuck in their cell watching 'X Factor' and that's bound to cause resentment."

Tonight's TV Recipe

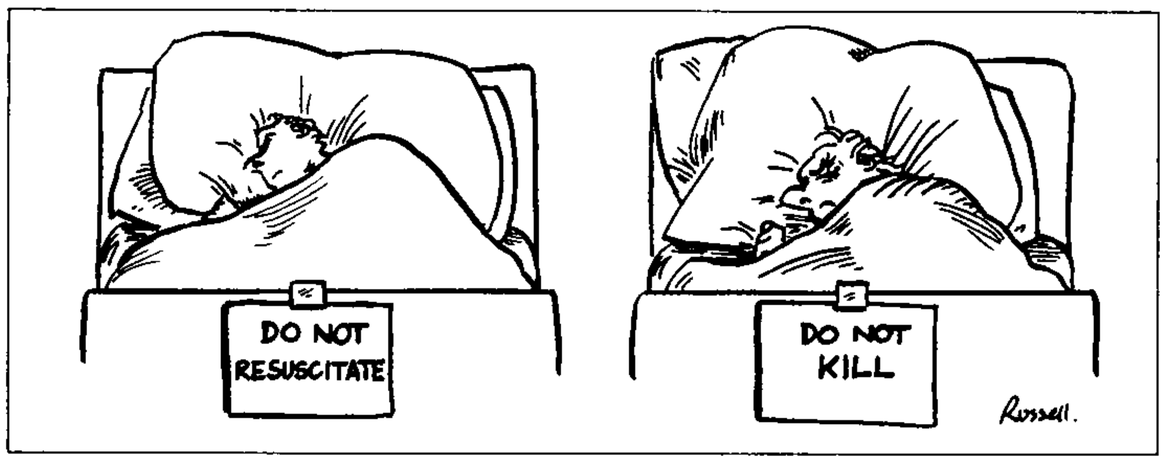
Bag of crisps

Serves one

Instructions:

- **Open bag**
- **Eat crisps**
- **Throw bag on floor**

Tomorrow: Chewing Gum



GLENDA SLAGG

Fleet Street's OAP (Old Age Panther, Geddit?!!?)

■ HILLARY CLINTON, what a disgrace!!?! She's the dirty old woman a-leerin' and a-peerin' at young Dave Miliband who's scarcely out of his shorts. Shame on you, Hillary, chasing toy boys when you should be at home in your rocking-chair knitting a cardigan for dear old Bill!!? Leave Diddy Dave alone!?!! Face it, honey, you're over the Hill-ary!?! (Geddit??!)

■ HATS OFF to Hillary Clinton!!?! She gives hope to all us gals of a certain age!!?! Why shouldn't she have the hots for Dishy Dave Miliband, or anyone else just out of short trousers!?!! A gal's never too old for a bit of slap and tickle with a tasty toy-boy!?! Good luck to you, Mrs Clinton, who says you're over the Hillary – not me!?! *(It was actually. Ed)* Why should Bonkin' Bill have all the fun?!? Geddit??! He does, and so should you !!?!

■ KATE MOSS!?!! She's the one telling gullible young gals to starve to death if they wanna look sexy!?!! You make me sick, darling!?! Why doncha just stick to making yourself sick!?? Geddit?! Take a lesson from Auntie Glenda – blokes don't want to bed a beanpole, for heaven's sake, they want a cutie with curves – and probably an older woman too, someone like yours truly, a pouting Panther who is looking for young prey to get her teeth into and *(Urgh!! That's enough. Ed.)*

■ GOOD ON yer, Kate!?!! The catwalk queen who is not afraid tell it like it is. And she's right - no fellas go for a tub of lard!?!! They wannem nice and thin!!?! Slim 'n' sexy !!?! Slender and Glenda – if they prefer the older woman who is *(I said that's enough. Ed.)*

■ HERE THEY ARE – Glenda's Advent Calendar Guys!?!

● **President Rumpy Pumpy.** He's Mr Muscles from Brussels!? OK, no-one voted for you, but you get my vote any day! Hai Koo-eeee!!?! Geddit?!!

● **Thierry Henry**. Here's a guy who knows how to use his hands in the penalty box!?!! Geddit?!! Ooh-La-La!!!

● **Jedward.** OK, so you're only 17 but I've got twin beds and I'm a much older woman who *(You're fired. Ed)*

Byeee!!

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

Letters to the Editor

Conservative Party Selection Procedures

SIR – As branch chairman of the Little Nooky-on-the-Side Conservative Association in Norfolk, I would like to protest in the strongest terms at the high-handed and arrogant fashion in which we, the local Tories, have been treated by Mr. Cameron and his metropolitan associates in foisting on us as our candidate Ms. Lynne Truss.

Ms. Truss may know all there is to be known about grammar and punctuation, but when it comes to the issues that concern us here in rural Norfolk, her knowledge of turnip husbandry leaves much to be desired.

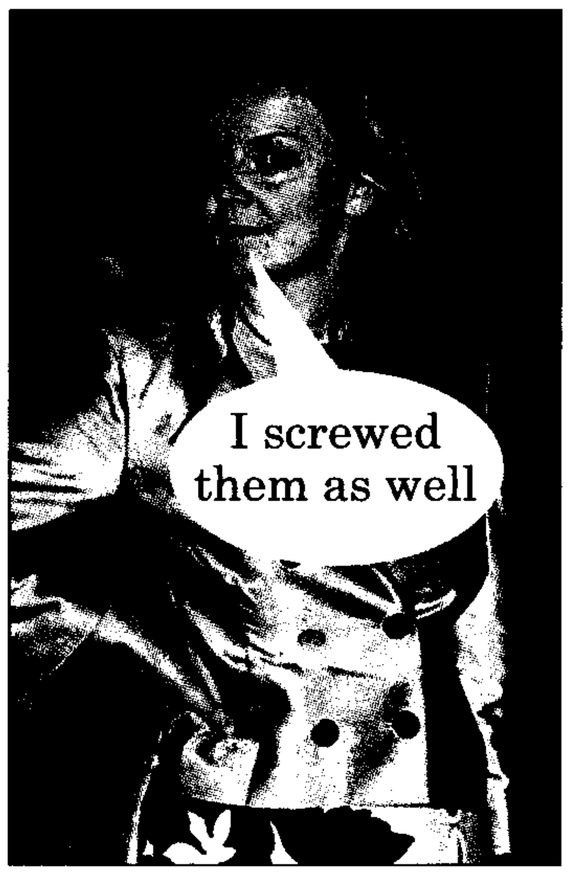
Let me add that Mr. Cameron deliberately concealed from us Ms. Truss's lurid sexual past, and in particular her flagrant carrying-on with a sitting Tory MP (or, in his case, a lying one!)

Not that we down here in Norfolk have any old-fashioned objections to a young lady getting up to no good with anyone she fancies, but we would like Mr. Cameron to know that there is no way we can accept as our MP this shameless hussy, however well-qualified she may be in the correct application of the semi-colon.

Yours faithfully,

Sir Bufton Turnip
Leaping-on-the-Broads,
Norfolk.

LIZ TRUSS DEFEATS 'TURNIP TALIBAN'



What You Missed

The Today Programme

Radio 4

Evan Davis *(for it is he)*: Good morning, Lord Mandelson. Thank you for coming on the programme.

Lord Mandelson *(for it is he)*: Hullo, sailor!

Davis: Get you!

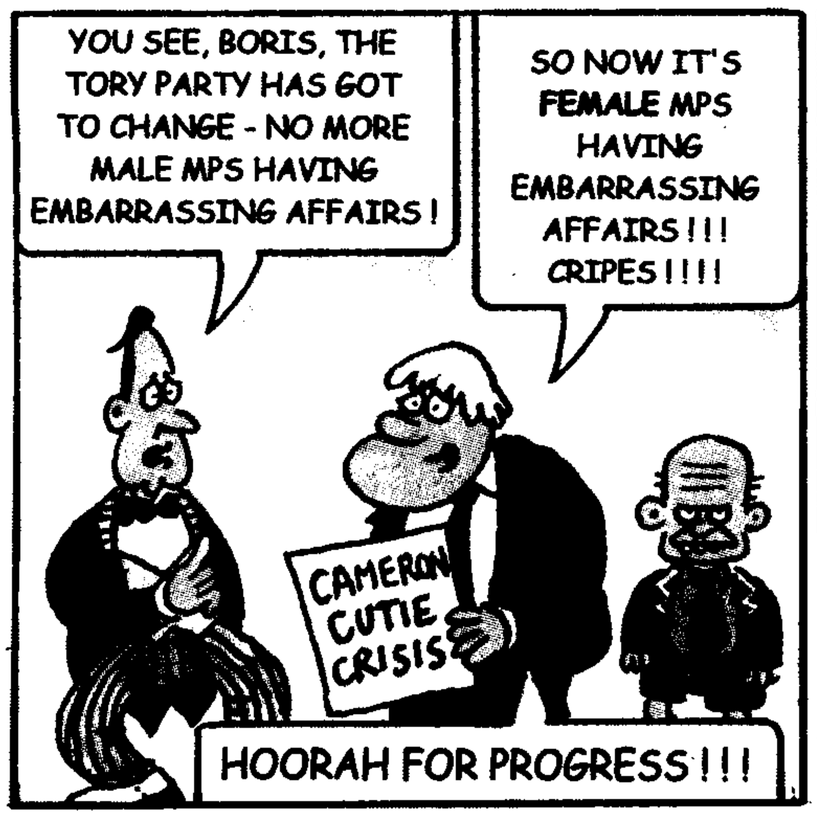
Mandy: Aren't you going to ask me one of your naughty questions?

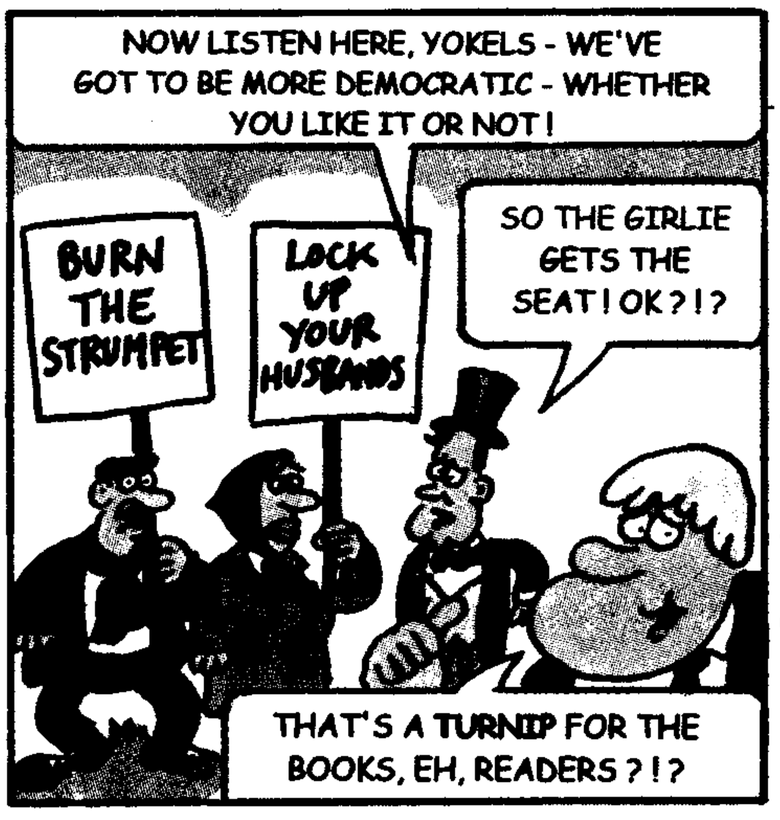
Davis: Cheeky!

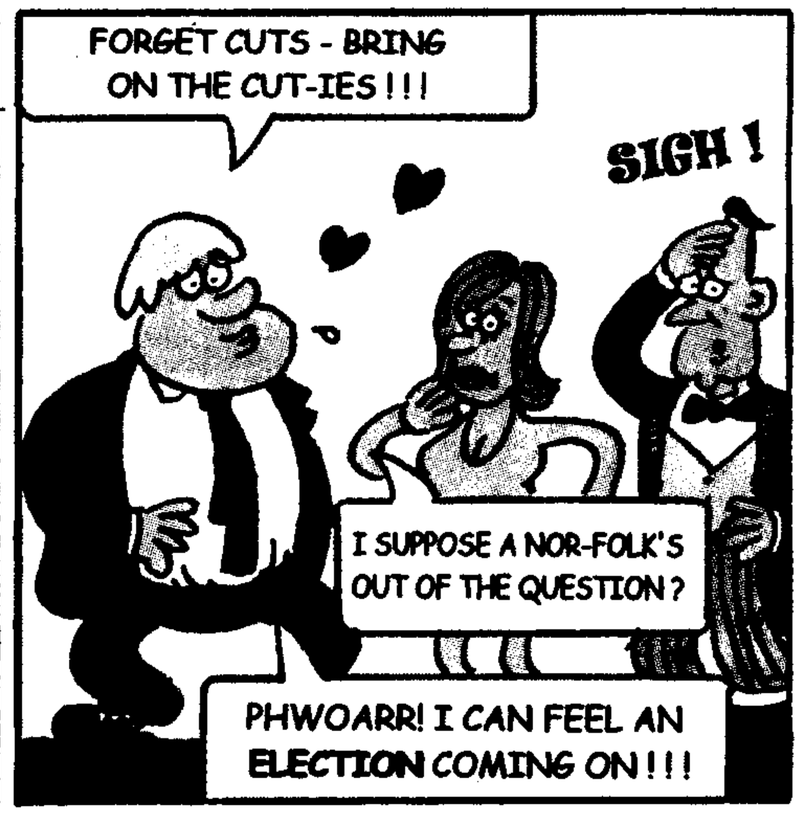
Mandy: Ooh, hark at her!

A fuller version of this interview on the government's legislative programme is available on our website at todaytrash/bbc/slash/slash/don'tbotherit'stoo complicated.

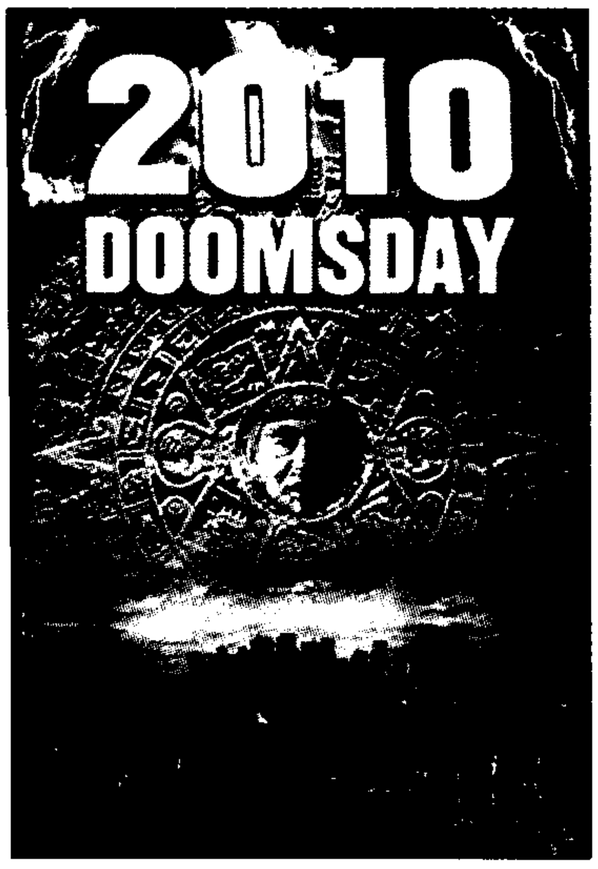
Dave Snooty AND HIS PALS


YOU SEE, BORIS, THE TORY PARTY HAS GOT TO CHANGE - NO MORE MALE MPS HAVING EMBARRASSING AFFAIRS !
SO NOW IT'S FEMALE MPS HAVING EMBARRASSING AFFAIRS !!! CRIPES !!!!
CAMERON CUTIE CRISIS
HOORAH FOR PROGRESS !!!


NOW LISTEN HERE, YOKELS - WE'VE GOT TO BE MORE DEMOCRATIC - WHETHER YOU LIKE IT OR NOT !
BURN THE STRUMPET
LOCK UP YOUR HUSBANDS
SO THE GIRLIE GETS THE SEAT ! OK ? ! ?
THAT'S A TURNIP FOR THE BOOKS, EH, READERS ? ! ?



Film Highlights



★ DISASTER movie to end all disaster movies, following the desperate attempt of anti-hero Gordon to save his skin in the face of a cataclysmic apocalypse at the polls. It all begins when the Sun flares up and causes Gordon's world to fall apart as seismic landslides threaten to engulf him. Will he survive? Probably not.

ALSO SHOWING

★ Michael Caine plays the elderly hero of the title, an embittered election veteran who tries to avenge himself on the public by making their lives a misery in his last days and *(we get the idea, Ed.)*

ME AND MY SPOON

LORD ASHCROFT

Lord Ashcroft, may I begin by asking you where your spoons come from?

No, you may not. That is a confidential matter.

Is it true as reported that you have provided all the spoons for Conservative central office?

I should warn you that I am a very rich man and that my lawyers are ready to take action against any spoon-related libel.

So do you pay tax on these spoons? The ones from Belize and the Caribbean ones and...

This line of questioning is not helpful. Perhaps you would like to ask me about my collection of VC-related spoons. This one comes from the Crimean War and is engraved with the name of Captain J.K. Pilborough of the 17/21st Turks and Caicos Grenadiers. There is even a small bullet-hole here in the bowl of the spoon...

Could I ask how much it is worth?

I think this interview is at an end. I have a very important appointment with the leader of the Conservative Party at his club, Whitewashes.

Will there be spoons there?

(Sadly, at this point Lord Ashcroft hung up and we were unable to ask him if anything amusing had ever happened to him in relation to a spoon).

NEXT WEEK: *Kate Moss "Me And My Moss".*

QUEEN'S SPEECH IN FULL

"He's the most feared judge on the bench – he's let off more psychopaths than the rest put together"

QUEEN'S SPEECH SHOCK OMISSION

Daily Mail
FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2009

PUDSEY'S NIGHT OF SHAME

by Phil Buttonhole

Pudsey: Face of evil

IT IS less than two weeks since Remembrance Day, but already BBC star Pudsey has shown his contempt for our brave troops by appearing on television without a poppy.

Said one veteran, Sergeant Madeup, "No wonder Pudsey has got a bandage round his head. I expect someone saw him refusing to wear a poppy and punched him in the eye – which is no more than he deserved."

Bear-faced Cheek

Sergeant Madeup continued, "It really is time that Pudsey's expenses were examined with a fine tooth comb to see just how much he has stolen from the public and how much he *hasn't* spent on buying a poppy."

Poppycock

Sergeant Madeup wiped a tear from his fictional eye as he concluded, "Pudsey should be sacked at once and all the so-called 'charity' money raised should be given to a worthy cause, such as Lord Rothermere-in-need-of-the-profitable-bits-of-the-BBC *(cont. p. 94)*

TV CHOICE

I'm A Casualty – Get Me Out Of Here!

The TV reality show that is about reality!

NOW in its 9th year, this is the 'Great Game' that no-one wants to watch! Set in the Afghan outback, it subjects the participants to terrifying trials as the public *doesn't* get to vote on whether they should be there or *(That's enough bad taste, Ed.)*

'I Was Bel de Mooney,' Admits Daily Mail Columnist

by **Rowan Pelling,** *former editor of 'The Erratic Review'*

FOR YEARS her identity was one of the most closely guarded secrets in Fleet Street.

Millions of readers hung on her every word, as she confessed to her secret life "writing for money".

By day, Bel de Looney was a respectable Somerset divorcee and yurt dweller, formerly married to a leading TV personality, who she says, "knew nothing of what I was getting up to when I was out of the house".

Her West Country neighbours knew her as "Mrs Dimbleby", as she drove around in her 4x4, promoting green causes.

Belle de Jour-nalist

None of them suspected that she was, in fact, the notorious Mail columnist Bel de Mooney, paid hundreds of thousands of pounds by a reclusive "Mr Big" (Paul Dacre), who would dictate exactly what she was meant to write.

Bel herself was unrepentant when her pseudonym was uncovered.

"In the modern world," she said, "women are free to do anything they want, and if that includes writing highly intimate pieces about their personal life in return for large cheques, so be it."

On Other Pages

- "Is £300 an hour too much for being a Daily Mail regular?" by Janet Street-Walker **94**
- "Why oh why is she being paid more than me?" asks A.N. Wilson **95**
- "Why Bel de Mooney is wrong to glamourise the dark world of writing for the Daily Mail," writes Mel de Phillips **96**
- "What's wrong with enjoying Christmas shopping?" demands Sir Max Hastings **97**

PLUS Your Trains Tonight – Bel de Brighton (cancelled)

Men In Suits Take Over Jobs From Other Men In Suits

by Our Business Staff Phil Vacancies

A NUMBER of men in suits were yesterday confirmed as successors to some other men in suits as heads of Britain's most prestigious companies.

Reaction in the City was one of delight. Said a spokesman in a suit, "These men will bring a breath of fresh air into the companies that the other men have just left."

He continued, "Although the men have no relevant experience in the industries they are about to run, they do have suits and that is the key factor in bringing confidence to the consumer and a boost to the markets."

Said Trevor, "I don't see much difference between filling the schedules and filling the shelves. The aim is to give customer satisfaction across the whole spectrum and, of course, to wear a suit."

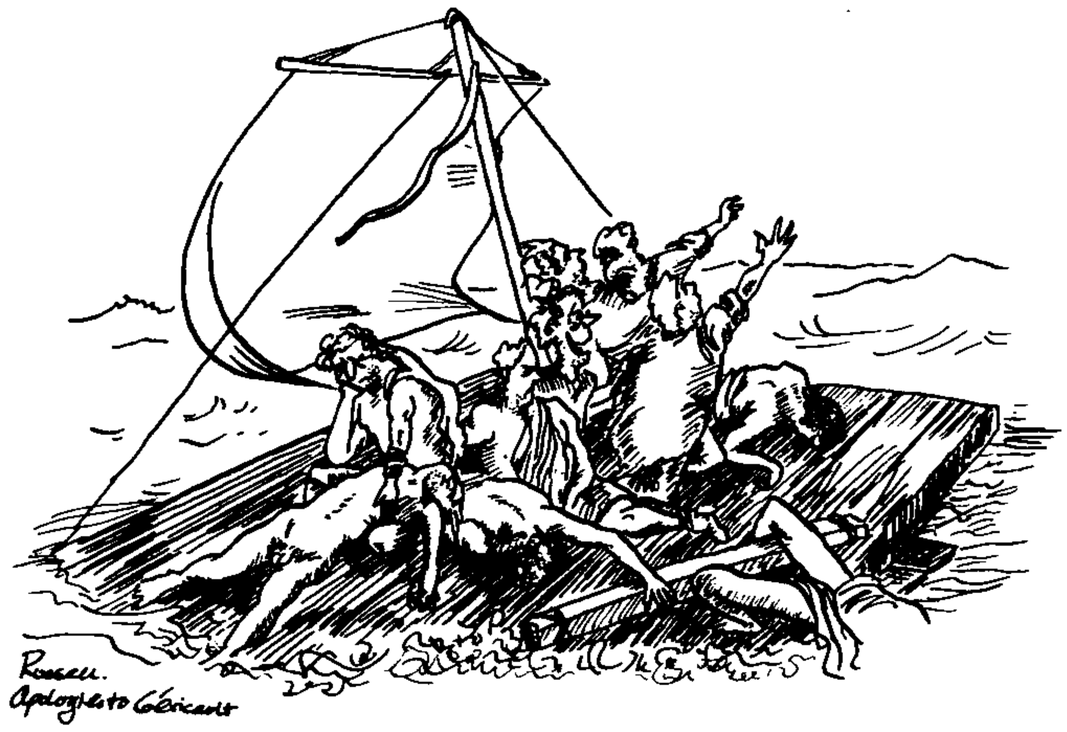
Trevor Norman, 46 Takes over as head of Asda. Described as "a highflyer and a man in a suit", Trevor previously ran ITV, the prestigious British-owned television channel, before being poached by Asda.

Said Norman, "My new job is a challenge, but it is essentially the same skill base. Selling cheap programmes is the same as selling cheap booze, such as our new six pack of Bulgarian Plum Cider for £2.99. My advice to customers is to drink it first and then you won't notice how bad the programmes are."

■ **Full list of men in suits** 94

Men in the Eye

Norman Trevor, 46 Takes over as head of ITV. Described as a "high-flyer and a man in a suit", Norman previously ran Asda, the prestigious high street supermarket chain, before being poached by ITV.



"You guys! I thought you'd just tie me to a lamp post but, wow! What a stag night that was!"

PM APOLOGISES FOR AUSTRALIAN MIGRANT TRAGEDY

By Our Apologies Staff Mia Culpa

GORDON BROWN spoke tonight of his "intense sadness" at the revelation that little Ben Elton had been sent off to Australia.

Mr Brown wept openly before the TV cameras as he admitted that the British government had pursued a heartless policy of driving out very rich comedy stars by taxing them at 50%.

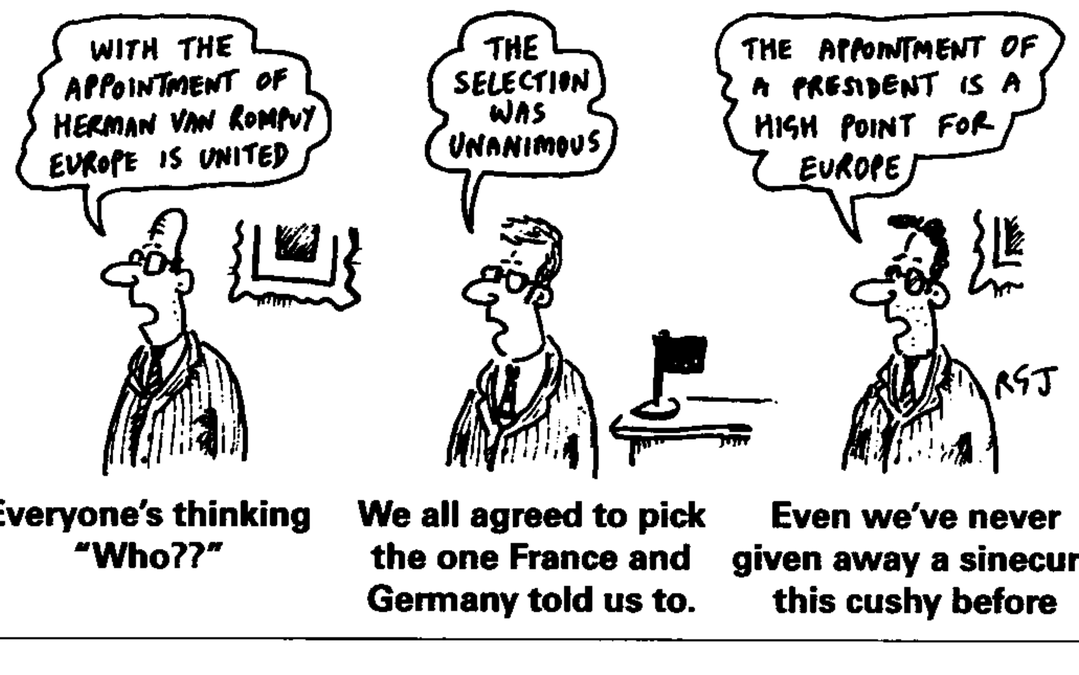
Furthermore, the international best-seller novelist and musical librettist was under the impression that he would enjoy a much happier life Down Under, living with wallabies and kangaroos who would laugh at his jokes.

"The truth was," sad Mr Brown, "we were desperate to get rid of little Ben because we were sick of him droning on about how much he hated Britain, how awful the Queen was, and how ungrateful the Brtitish public were for all that he had done for them."

Mr Brown said he was "deeply sorry" to the Australians for sending them Mr Elton, in what he described as "one of the most shameful episodes in British history".

The Australian prime minister last night hit back by apologising to the British people for sending them a flood of unwanted migrants. He named Germaine Greer, Clive James, Rolf Harris and Kathy Lette as examples of *(cont. p. 94)*

EU-phemisms


WITH THE APPOINTMENT OF HERMAN VAN ROMPUY EUROPE IS UNITED
THE SELECTION WAS UNANIMOUS
THE APPOINTMENT OF A PRESIDENT IS A HIGH POINT FOR EUROPE
RSJ

Everyone's thinking "Who??"

We all agreed to pick the one France and Germany told us to.

Even we've never given away a sinecure this cushy before

The Alternative Rocky Horror Service Book

No. 94 A Memorial Service to Commemorate the Life of a Famous and Devout Atheist

The President: A very warm welcome indeed to all our brothers and sisters from the media who have come here to this place of worship in order to take pictures of you all for tomorrow's newspapers. May I begin by asking all the celebrities present to stand up and give a sign to the photographers.

Here Shall Follow the Taking of the Photographs

The President: We are gathered here today to give thanks for the life of *(here he may say Sir John Mortimer or Sir Ludovic Kennedy or some other famous non-believer)*. Obviously, we are not giving thanks to God, because none of you believe in all that nonsense *(laughter)*.

So shall we start with a famous reading by a famous actor. *(Here he may say Jeremy Irons, Stephen Fry, Judi Dench or someone similar)*.

Reading from the Book of Ecclesiasticus

"Let us now praise famous personalities, men (and of course women) renowned for their celebrity; such as those who appeared regularly on TV and were frequently interviewed in the newspapers. All these were honoured with knighthoods and CBEs."

The President: That's enough of the reading. Now it is time for some music played by some of the famous friends of the famous celebrity whose memory we are honouring today in this beautiful old cathedral, which is available for hire at a very reasonable rate for such occasions as corporate dinners, book launches and editions of the Antiques Roadshow.

(The music which shall follow may be rock 'n' roll, jazz, songs from the shows, Frank Sinatra or any other popular style of music, so long as it is not a hymn.)

Prayers

The President: There will be no prayers.

The Creed

All Shall Here Say: We don't believe in God the Father Almighty, although we are prepared to concede that Jesus had many good points. We believe in basic human values as exemplified in the life of the late N or M – laughter, fine wine, the company of attractive women and agreeable holidays in Tuscany.

Here They May Also Say: We also believe in the basic human right to assisted suicide with the assistance of the Dignitas clinic in Switzerland, because there is no afterlife, obviously.

The President: So that's pretty well it. It's been a really fun occasion and I almost forgot we were in a church! *(Here the congregation may laugh)*. As N or M once wittily remarked to the Sunday Times, "Going to church is the last thing I shall ever do." *(Here they may laugh again)*

The Dismissal

The President: You may now all go out for more photographs and interviews on the church steps especially for any mistresses and love-children.

The Blessing

Vicar: Bless!

All: Bless!

Vicar: Bless.

All: We mustn't come more often!

(The congregation shall then leave to a suitable piece of music, it may be the Trumpet Voluntary Euthanasia by Jeremiah Clarkson or the theme from What the Papers Say [trad.])

"I think he has a groin strain"

From The Message Boards

Members of the online community respond to the major issues of the day...

Poor white boys underachieve at school

Typical nu liebore. First ban rough and tumble in the playground, then castigate boys for not studying. There is a word for the sort of boy who likes to read books. The word is "girl". Harriet HARM-MAN will not rest until the feminisation programme is complete, with oestrogen in the water, phthalates emasculating baby boys, and female bosses sculpted by plastic surgeons at the taxpayers' expense. They shamelessly provoke us, forcing us to wear Woolsey Straps to restrain our manhood or face stern disciplinary procedures. Their painted faces smile cruelly at our discomfort and humiliation but we retain our dignity. WE ARE MEN. – ***Race_and_Nation***

The mongrel "British" are reaping the rotten harvest of two centuries of "education". They build schools on fields where Angelfolc once fought. – ***Athelstan***

Phase one: white boys "fail" exams. Phase two: Chief Constable of Miscegenation (Manchester) demands that all police officers be graduates. No degree in diversity studies required to read his mind. – ***Odal***

Being ex-job myself I can tell you that most coppers can't spell or recite their two times table. These days most graduates can't either so what's the difference? As for recruiting our ethnic friends, I remember that sticker in the 1970's with a gorilla in a police helmet. We had one stuck on the station's notice board for years! Like 99.9 percent of officers I wasn't prejudiced in any way but you had to laugh. – ***Brian***

in the paper it say's travler's even worst than white boy's in the school result's ☻ at least there won't be no pikey copper's ☺ good evnin madem ur tires apeer 2 b flat "WAT" u bin slashin them agane pc pikey? ☺ – ***Hunny_pot***

Time to end the disastrous democratic experiment. – ***Sword_of_Truth***

Those Vatican Summit Talks In Full

Very Reverend Rowan Atkinson: Perhaps we could begin by focusing on the need for our two faith communities to try to establish a framework for moving forward towards a possible situation in which both churches feel comfortable working together to create a constructive relationship which could both embrace our respective traditions and yet...

His Holiness Benedict XCIV: Gott in Himmel! For you, Beardie, ze Church is over! Auf wiedersehen schweinhund!

That Joint Communique In Full

The Pope and the Archbishop enjoyed full and frank discussions on a range of issues in a session that was friendly, fruitful and lasted 35 seconds.

DIARY

CRAIG BROWN
for the Daily Mail

GORDON BROWN, Prime Minister: As a totally normal person, I am a huge fan of the S Factor. Frankly, I tune in my wireless and listen to it whenever I can. I regret to say, I was quoted last week as saying that these two young singers were "not very good". I could see that, from their point of view, this might have been misinterpreted to mean that they were in some way "not very good". I immediately sought to remedy the matter. This morning, I took the trouble to telephone these two girls to clear this matter up for once and for all. "I know that people are saying that I said you were "not very good" " I told them, "But what I actually said was that you were "not VERY good", which is, as you will understand, quite another thing, particularly as what I really wanted to say was that you were hopeless, but, through natural human sympathy, I had no wish to hurt your feelings."

I feel sure these two quite talented young ladies better known as Dedward took my apology in the spirit intended. They're certainly better than the others. Now you will have to excuse me. I have to write personally to each of the others in order to apologise for any unintended slight that may or may not emerge from my previous remark.

BARACK OBAMA, US President: Jedward are real and they are everywhere. And I tell you this. As a nation, we must face up not only to the songs that they have sung, but to the songs that they continue to sing; not only to the songs they will sing but to the songs they will have sung; and not only to the songs they hope to sing but to the songs that, in the fullness of time, will have been sung by them. So it is with profound gratitude and great humility that I stand before my television today and face up to the threat as, with one voice, they pour their hearts into the classic Queen song "Under Pressure". And let me promise you this. By the end of this competition, there will not be one man, there will not be one woman or one child in this great land who has not found the strength from somewhere deep within their own heart to withstand the force of hearing Jedward sing. And to you all I say this. I understand your pain. I understand your horror. I understand your sense of injustice. But the road away from Jedward is long, and it is one we all must travel if ever we are to achieve closure. And let me add

JEDWARD: FOR OR AGAINST?

this. I have already embarked on that great voyage. And, however long and arduous that road away from Jedward, I shall not cease to strive until it ends.

SIR V.S. NAIPAUL, author: Sadly, Jedward's reputation remains low. You can see the disappointment etched on their faces. They are becoming aware that civilisation cannot withstand another of their victories. A reasonable judge would lock them in a room with two pistols and two glasses of strong whisky and ask them to do the decent thing, only this time in unison.

NICHOLAS HASLAM, socialite: Edward is the most marvellous young man I have ever seen. His cheeky vertical hair is gloriously distingue and his voice is as cool and clear as a mountain stream somewhere near the better end of Gstaad. John, on the other hand is common, common, common! Doesn't he realise how desperately common it is to wear your hair vertical? And he sings like a castrated tom cat. And, believe me, everyone knows how common it is to castrate your tom cat. It's Edward I feel sorry for, the poor little bunny.

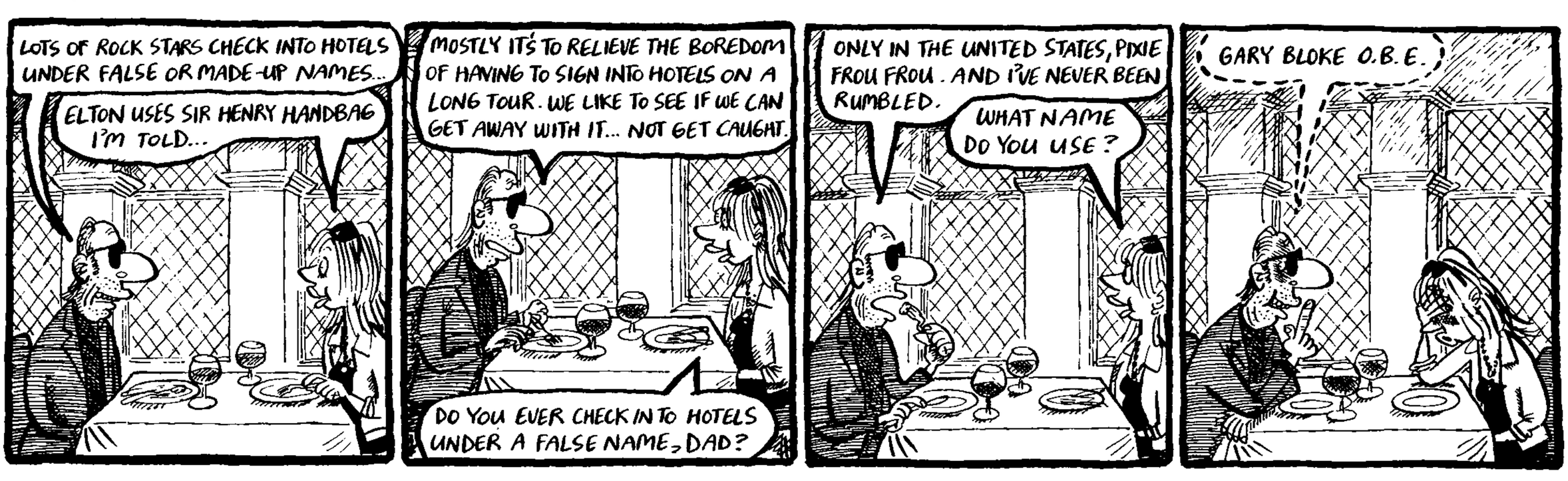
WILLIAM REES-MOGG, commentator: I have, over the years, met half a dozen X Factor winners, none of them wholly distinguished. If the results of the 1971 Eurovision Song Contest are anything to go by, as I certainly believe them to be, the overall winner of this year's X will surely be the redoubtable Miss Frank, with Jamie Archer a far from unworthy runner-up.

TONY BENN, politician: It's something the Establishment don't want us knowing about, and they're desperate to hush up, because of course they don't want ordinary, decent people asking awkward questions, do they, but I know for a fact that John and Edward are not two different lads, they are just one lad – Jedward – appearing with a full length mirror provided for him by the secret services. You see, he's a fully paid-up member. It's quite terrifying, really, when you come to think about it. The Establishment want to undermine the whole voting process on the X Factor by forcing us to vote for a young lad with a mirror. It's a bleak day for democracy, it really is.

HEATHER MILLS McCARTNEY, Nobel Prize Winner, Lady in her own right: James and David both wanted to marry me, they begged me, but I said no, boys, you're too young, and anyway I must concentrate on my animal charity work because all the poor animals of the world would never forgive me if they found themselves being killed and their fur being stripped off them and just as they were dying under the wicked hammer blows of these ruthless hunters they thought to themselves, "Heather promised us we'd be safe and sound but now she's married James and David they're frankly taking all our time and now she's forgotten all about us, so thanks a lot, Heather" because that would break my heart it really would, I'm sorry, I'm getting tearful just think about it, but I'm not saying whose to blame for all those animals being wickedly murdered because I don't want my daughter to think worse of her father, I really don't, that's so not the kind of person I am.

PROFESSOR CHRISTOPHER RICKS, academic, author of " Dylan's Visions of Sin": The sound of Jedward singing the Middle of the Road classic, "Chirpy Chirpy Cheep Cheep" is both plangent and poignant but, perhaps above all, pungent.

"Where's your mother gone? Where's your mother gone?" they demand to know, over and over again, and the question is doubly upsetting, as they are twins and, as such, must be defined by their essential twin-ness. The answer to their question comes, as though from a deity, deliberate yet undefined, penetrable only in its impenetrability, meaningful only in its very meaninglessness: "Chirpy Chirpy Cheep Cheep Chirpy Chirpy Chirpy Chirp". An answer, yes: but an answer that, like a veritable Gorgon's Head, raises yet more questions, all of them crying out to be answered.


LOTS OF ROCK STARS CHECK INTO HOTELS UNDER FALSE OR MADE-UP NAMES...
ELTON USES SIR HENRY HANDBAG I'M TOLD...
MOSTLY IT'S TO RELIEVE THE BOREDOM OF HAVING TO SIGN INTO HOTELS ON A LONG TOUR. WE LIKE TO SEE IF WE CAN GET AWAY WITH IT... NOT GET CAUGHT.
DO YOU EVER CHECK IN TO HOTELS UNDER A FALSE NAME, DAD?
ONLY IN THE UNITED STATES, PIXIE FROU FROU. AND I'VE NEVER BEEN RUMBLED.
WHAT NAME DO YOU USE?
GARY BLOKE O.B.E.

Literary Review

Mail droop

The Letters of T.S. Eliot Volume 2: 1923-1925

Valerie Eliot and Hugh Haughton (Eds)

(Faber, £35)

MORE than 20 years in the editing, a mammoth 850 pages long, quite two inches thick and with addressees ranging from Ezra Pound ("Cher E") to Virginia Woolf – welcome back, my friends, to the weird and wonderful world of Thomas Stearns Eliot.

Or rather to the tiny, storm-tossed quadrant of it staked out between 1923 and 1925 when our man, then in his mid-30s, was engaged in a) editing the *Criterion*, an immensely highbrow quarterly subsidised by Lady Rothermere; b) vacillating over whether to leave his day-job at Lloyds bank; and c) dealing with the calamitous illnesses of his wife, Vivien. What do they tell us about Eliot the poet? And what do they tell us about Eliot the man?

The answer to question one is: virtually nothing. This is mostly editorial chit-chat, doctors' pronouncements and money worries. As for question two... Well, singly and severally the letters are uncannily supportive of the sketch of the fifty-something Eliot that appears in the third volume of Anthony Powell's memoirs, *Faces In My Time* (1980).

Getting through his post-demob army gratuity on holiday in north Devon in autumn 1945, Powell discovered that the great poet was lodging in a nearby farm-house. Glimpsed off-duty, taking afternoon tea with friends or drinking pints of cider in the pub, Eliot, Powell decided, "had just a touch of the headmaster, laying aside his dignity for a talk with the more intelligent boys", while bringing to the discussion an amalgam of "tea-table cosiness with a cold intellectuality".

Certainly the school-masterly note – sometimes faintly exasperated, sometimes encouraging, nearly always patient and engrossed – clangs over the current proceedings like a church bell. Here, plainly, was a man who, whether as writer, editorial eminence or anxious husband, found it impossible to relax, switch off or otherwise unbend, and who isn't above using even his fan-mail as an excuse to read pedagogic lectures. "I am very glad to send you my autograph" runs a note to a hapless American petitioner named Glen Walter Blodgett, "and hope in return for this trifling favour you will make me happy by ceasing to *split infinitives*."

It is not that he lacks a sense of humour – there are one or two attempts at mild guying and several self-consciously "amusing remarks" – merely that, as with every other compartment of his life, Eliot found humour a very serious business, and the general effect is of a rather austere cleric ordering his curates out of the room while he changes into jester's motley ahead of the parish Christmas treat.

All this necessarily renders this prodigious volume very hard going. Leaving aside the chronic high-mindedness, and Vivien's serial encounters with the medical profession, what really irks is the completism. Whenever Eliot decides to write to half-a-dozen eminent men soliciting contributions, we get the same letter six times only with a different salutation. Then there are the social one-liners ("Dear Mr [Arnold] Bennett, Thank you very much. I shall be happy to come on Tuesday at 9 o'clock"), the deathless editorial interventions ("With regard to the final paragraph commencing 'On on on on', we should be glad to know whether you would object to only one 'on'..."), and the endless haggling over fees ("I thought that I had made it quite clear that the payment would be at the rate of £10 per 5000 words", Ezra Pound is sternly admonished. "Your essay comes to 3,545 words"). All of which prompts the reader to reflect that it must have been a very interesting experience to edit the *Criterion* in the age of Stanley Baldwin, but not *infinitely* so.

On the other hand there is a fair amount of comedy in this gargantuan enterprise, most of it unintentional. Eliot's distinctive brand of right-wing Modernism can be very funny, the contempt for socialism (no dowager was more agonised by "the alarming rise of the Labour Party to power") and the dogged claims that "for me English Literature ends well before 1800" combining with a zealous enthusiasm for the latest avant-garderie from the continent. Just as amusing are the horribly obsequious letters to his literary seniors – Yeats, Charles Whibley, W.P. Ker – angling for copy ("I think you did not receive the proposal unfavourably...") or exclaiming over its merits ("I anticipate very eagerly the effect which I am sure it will have...") and generally laying on the flattery with a pitch-fork.

The thought of another 5,000 or so pages of all this is as sobering a prospect as one of Vivien's medical bulletins.

The letters of T.S. Eliot

Books & Bookmen

■ ROBIN HARVIE, teenage *wunderkind* at publisher Fourth Estate, toddled down to Westminster last week with a boxful of *Crap MPs: The 40 Worst Members of Parliament in History*. He stood outside the St Stephen's Gate to the Commons, dishing out free copies to hacks and legislators as they entered.

It was when he offered one to Michael Howard (who politely declined, saying he had already ordered a copy from Amazon) that a couple of passing coppers leapt into action. "You can't do that," they said, grabbing Harvie by the arm and frogmarching him away. He now has a document confirming that he has been formally cautioned "for handing out free book entitled *Crap MPs*".

The irony is that before these two Knackers came on the scene, five of the police officers on guard duty had already asked for – and received – copies of the offending volume.

■ WHEN Jonathan Ross tweeted in May: "I have a great idea! Let's start a book club on Twitter! One a week and we all post mini-reviews!", the excitable coverage which followed suggested to readers that the book world was about to witness a phenomenon.

"Booksellers will hope that the new Twitter venture will help fill the hole after Richard and Judy's chatshow was axed," reported the *Mail* amid a blizzard of press coverage. Publishing houses rushed to woo Woss with their latest releases, as Picador sped out a new digital edition of his first featured title, Jon Ronson's *The Men Who Stare at Goats*. Amanda Ross, founder and main decision-maker behind Richard & Judy's book club, had some sage words of advice for the man who happens to be her brother-in-law: "Do it in bursts, don't get greedy. Do it for a bit then rest, give people a chance to keep up with the books."

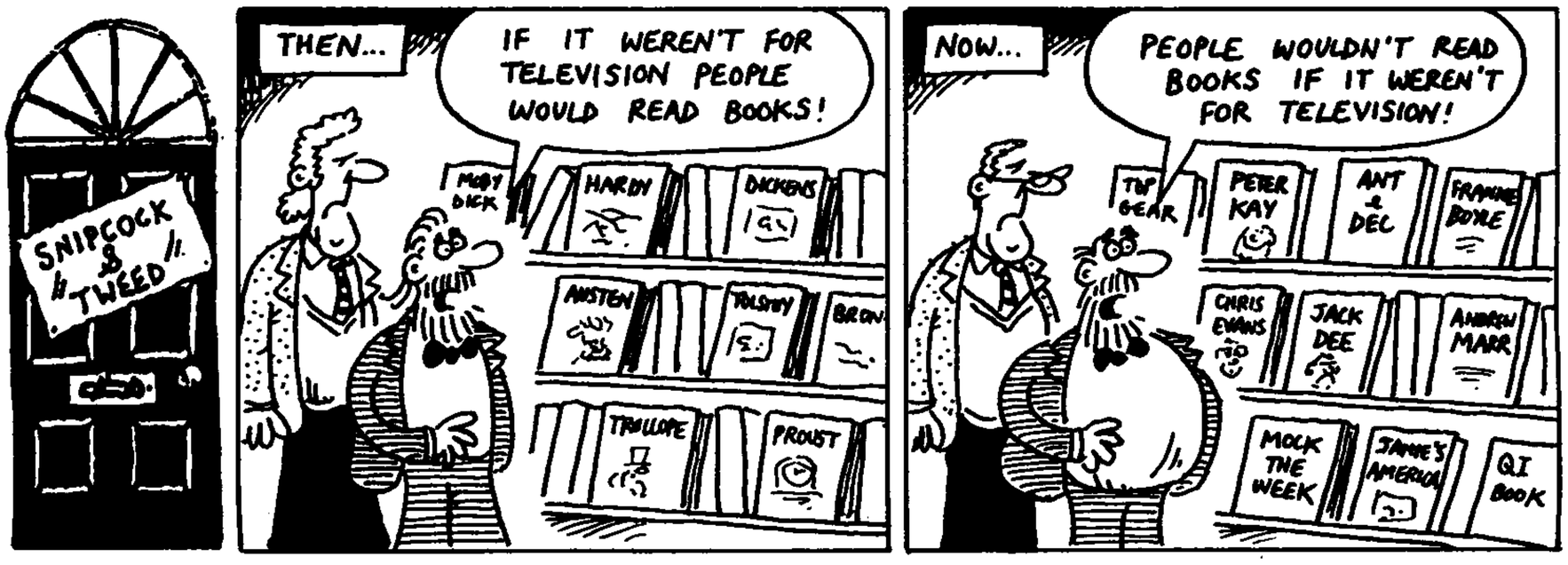
He certainly seems to have taken her advice to heart. On 14 June "Wossy" tweeted his failure to get through the third title he proposed for his followers – "Have guilty confession – have not finished *Foreskin's Lament* yet!" The titles selected and discussed in the club since mid-July can be summed up in much fewer than the maximum 140-character limit of a Twitter message. Um, none.

■ IN OUR last issue we noted the belief of Philip Downer, CEO and part-owner of bookshop chain Borders, that "a significant portion of our income will come from something we haven't yet identified".

It seems he has now sussed out what that might be. Last week, following the departure of the company's entire e-commerce team and a refusal by one major distributor to provide any more stock to Borders until their bills were paid, the *Financial Times* advertised a "Large retail chain for sale".

■ SIGRID Rausing, the Tetrapak heiress and philanthropist who owns *Granta* magazine, Granta books and Portobello, is becoming increasingly high-profile, thanks partly to the columns she has written for former *Granta* editor Jason Cowley's *New Statesman*.

But going into print unfiltered by minders who can say "no" to her seems a bad idea to judge by her bizarre recent statement touching on the sudden departure of Cowley's successor, Alex Clark. The final straw causing Clark's exit from Granta – which was followed by that of Granta Publications MD David Graham and the magazine's



senior editor Ros Porter – is widely believed to have been the rejection of a piece on sloth by Salman Rushdie, primarily because (as it was turned into a pamphlet) the magazine does not run previously published work.

Rausing, however, insisted that dropping Rushdie "had nothing to do with" Clark, Graham or Porter leaving, before rejoicing that John Freeman – her latest editor, who divides his time between the US and UK – *is* planning to run the article. Rashly, she went on to list the literary names dropped in the essay, and (apparently oblivious to its pisspoor quality) to quote a fantasy passage imagining Goncharov's slothful hero Oblomov in bed with, er, the model Linda Evangelista:

"Oblomov is content, and drowsy. Linda is unhappy, tense, wide-eyed. But character is destiny, as Heraclitus said, and they are both in the grip of the terrible fate of having to be themselves. The day drifts on. Here we lie, they say silently, almost echoing Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms. We can do no other. They do not move."

Not only were Clark and Porter right to decline Rushdie's musings, most readers of this drivel will conclude, but in doing so they could be considered to have been protecting the writer from himself. If only someone could do the same for the Granta proprietor.

■ AS Christmas approaches, commercial publishers increasingly resemble a bedraggled bunch of gamblers who backed the wrong horses.

Duped by the chart-topping success of a handful of recent showbiz memoirs (Peter Kay, Paul O'Grady, Dawn French, etc), they splashed out stonking advances – often plus ghost-writing fees – on dozens of stars they believed were so beloved the public would find their scribblings irresistible. So far they seem to have been very wrong. Will the last few weeks before Christmas save their very expensive blushes?

More next issue.

'Bookworm'

Her moan deficiency

Loose Women: Here Come The Girls!

(Hodder & Stoughton, £16.99)

"WINTER can be bleak, but fear not," screeches the intro, above a rudimentary illustration of a snowflake. "We're here to help get you through it!" Yes, hurl your menthol lozenges to the wind, for here are the Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid, Donner, Blitzen and Nolan of lunchtime TV, come to drag us out of our seasonal torpor with a jingling cache of warming yarns, "saucy confessions" and unexpurgated celebrity tittle-tattle ("Chris de Burgh told me that his friend had a halogen lamp factory," confides Denise Welch, by way of example. "It was in Maidenhead.")

Released to coincide with the 10th anniversary of ITV1's *Loose Women* – a topical chat arrangement composed mainly of earrings and jokes about penises – *Here Come the Girls!* is presented as a series of conversations among the nine-strong *LW* sequin massive: a Socratic dialogue on, as the cover intones, "the things that really matter in life". Thus we learn that putative loose cannon Carol McGiffin "can't wear itchy wool", while a debate on nightwear climaxes with Coleen Nolan's assertion that her cotton/Lycra nightie is "the best" because, "if you get hot you can roll it up a bit, and if you get cold, you roll it down".

Throughout exhaustive discourses on death and diarrhoea the *Loose Women* maxim clangs like the bell of a sinking galleon: we chat, therefore we are. Though this would probably look quite fetching inscribed on a gold-plated pendant, its ostensibly breezy appeal becomes rather less endearing when stretched across 337 bewilderingly thorough pages.

Was it really necessary, for example, to devote an entire chapter to the "girls'" opinions on make-up? Does anyone other than Carol McGiffin care what Carol McGiffin has to add to the fur debate ("people don't like stuff but it just goes on")? Like the TV series, *Loose Women: HCTG!* equates the very act of talking with empowerment – as if subjecting everything from moisturiser ("nice") to flies ("hideous") to a philosophical boil wash is automatic grounds for feminist celebration, rather than merely evidence of a startling lack of both editorial interference and self-restraint.

Amid a blizzard of groundless exclamation marks, topics are introduced and prolonged via questions posed by irksome ex-GMTV weathergirl Andrea McLean. "What about you, Lynda?" she asks Lynda Bellingham during an interminable treatise on regrettable festive experiences. "Do you have a sad yuletide tale?"

"Well, I had several miserable Christmases when I was married to my second husband...!" responds Bellingham as the reader, by now weeping profusely, lunges for another bottle of gin.

Perhaps unsurprisingly the bulk of the slingback collective's attention is reserved for men. And it's here that the mouth-storm reaches critical mass – a Category 5 belter of reckless, excruciating witlessness. Husbands and former lovers hover mutely on the peripheries, pressing their frozen noses against the glass as the *LW* think tank assesses their habits, domestic usefulness and body hair with a certainty that is as unnerving as it is demeaning.

Males are adjudged either bumbling teddy bears (the current partners, bless them) or uncommunicative and/or adulterous bastards skulking in anecdotal doorways, ready to spring out, cape flapping, to wreak emotional carnage once more (the exes; boo, hiss, he's behind you, etc). Only McGiffin's 27-year-old fiancé finds himself excused from the teddy/tyrant ruling, his every mention eliciting instead a Pavlovian fanfare of fnaaars and repeated references to the couple's carnal merriment ("I don't actually mind it going on for a bit!"). Sexist? Undoubtedly. Yet the objectification appears born of (repeatedly misjudged) attempts at humour rather than genuine bloke-hatred – a fact that ensures the accompanying cackles of glee are not so much offensive as just really, really stupid.

On and on and on it goes, through cardigan tips and ruminations on buttocks, a tornado of inanity sweeping up everything before it and leaving nothing but biscuit crumbs and the faintest trace of Giorgio by Giorgio Beverly Hills. Meanwhile, high above the churning whoosh of hot air is the sound of feminism being strapped into a time machine and launched into a crowd of screaming Roundheads.

'Doofer'

REMAINDERS OF THE DAY

"THIS is the book every Jason and Kylie fan has been waiting for," Jason Donovan's agent told the *Sunday Mirror* when it was reported in 2007 that HarperCollins had paid a £1m advance for Donovan's autobiography.

Between the Lines, rrp £18.99, was spotted this week in the 99p Shop in Balham, south London.

I think it's impossible to live in a room which isn't at least 13 ft high. Don't you?
Jewellery designer KENNETH JAY LANE shows the Daily Telegraph around his Park Lane apartment.

Watching football, whether at the Emirates or in a gravel clearing in rural Tanzania, permits access to a set of patterns and formations, intricate threads of pass and move, a constant flow of skirmish and retreat. We are ravished not merely by football's competitive intensity but by its kaleidoscopic geometry. It is at once more complex and more coherent than anything from the imagination of Jackson Pollock.

MATTHEW SYED,
The Times

'...there's a regret afterwards. I always think of that Damian Hirst title, *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of the Living*. The impossibility of post-chocolate in the mind of the pre-chocolate. Iam not going to run and then eat a Twix – all that stupid running for just one Twix. As I am with chocolate, I am with everything.

RUSSELL BRAND on eating or not eating chocolate,
Sunday Times

'They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old – Age shall not weary them...' Robert Laurence Binyon (August 1869 – March 1943) was not a Molineux season ticket holder. Indeed it is highly unlikely that the First World War Red Cross medical orderly ever ventured north of the Watford Gap.

But fittingly on Remembrance Sunday it is his famous words, which ring out across churchyards and town centres every year on this day, that could be a perfect eulogy for one Wolves stalwart who is doing all he can to keep Father Time at bay.

Jody Craddock is 34, and in the form of his life. 'I am feeling as fit as I have ever done but it doesn't get any easier,' he reflects.

Birmingham Sunday Mercury

I really do think artists are the most important people on the planet, and if what I do is a utility and helps them, then that makes me happy. I want to be helpful.

Serpentine Gallery 'super-curator' HANS ULRICH OBRIST,
London Evening Standard

Contributors: Flora Watkins, MH, 'Plobby', Nick Evans, Simon Deverson.

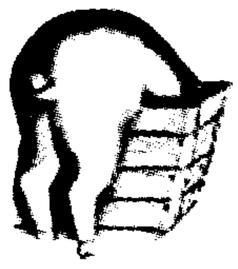
£10 paid for all entries

Pseuds Corner

IN THE BACK

AUDIT COMMISSION JUNKETS

Food for thought



WITH the future looking rosy for public service "outsourcing", especially under a likely Tory government, companies such as Serco and Capita are busy promoting the "efficiencies" they claim to offer in the age of austerity.

Thus the outsourcers are keenly sucking up to the watchdog that is meant to police such local and health authority deals, the Audit Commission. Freedom of information disclosures obtained by the *Eye* show that in the 18 months from April 2008, the commission's chairman Michael O'Higgins was schmoozed by top outsourcers including BT, Serco and Crapita.

BT's then chief executive Ben Verwaayen took O'Higgins to a garden party at a private address, and to three choral concerts and a summer reception. Serco provided lunches at the Cinnamon Club and Glasshouse restaurants and a "reception and dinner" at a "private address". And the *Eye*'s old chum Crapita paid for O'Higgins' dinner and hotel room during a conference organized by the *Guardian*.

Do they get value for money from such entertaining? Quite coincidentally, 18 months ago an Audit Commission report seemed to ignore the outsourcing disasters that litter local public services (*Eyes passim ad nauseam*) to conclude: "If managed robustly, these agreements become true partnerships that deliver benefits for users and council taxpayers alike." Yeah, right.

Outsourcers and management consultants have also been keen to feed up the Audit Commission's chief executive Steve Bundred – as were a number of bigwigs whose organizations he is responsible for auditing, including Richard Arthur, chairman of Camden and Islington health foundation trust, who thought picking up the tab at the Avenue, off Piccadilly, a reasonable use of taxpayers' money. The chief executives of Islington, Essex and Hackney spent their council taxpayers' cash on nosh-ups for Bundred at Bank restaurant in Westminster, Bellamy's off Berkeley Square and Bertorelli in Covent Garden respectively.

The Audit Commission's managing director for health, Andy McKeon, followed his bosses' lead and was entertained on 70 separate occasions over two and a half years, largely by consultants, private health companies and industry-funded thinktanks doubtless pressing the case for the marketisation of health services that the Audit Commission is supposed to audit objectively. More bizarrely he was also taken for dinner twice in the space of a week last year by the Department of Health, ie the taxpayer, to the Royal Thames Yacht Club and the Carlton Club to discuss "future pricing policy".

JUST FANCY THAT

MUCH has been made of the footage of "Suralan" Sugar at a recent business event held by the East of England Development Agency, where he was asked "How can we get this region out of recession?" and responded only by muttering "Ach, shit" and walking off.

But that wasn't Sugar's only strop. Before the event, speakers were chatting and minding their own business in the lounge. As soon as Sugar arrived, he made it clear that all the other speakers, until then not paying him the slightest attention, would have to leave so he could prepare his presentation. Embarrassed EEDA staff had to clear the whole speakers' lounge for Sir Alan, his small entourage, and his rather larger ego.

MILITARY SALES

Sudan impact

THE jailing of businessman Andrew Jackson for selling troop carriers to Sudan without an export licence was hailed as a great victory for HM Revenue and Customs' specialist unit on military exports. But its proud announcement earlier this month conspicuously failed to mention that Jackson's firm is in fact a UK government contractor which boasts that it works "very closely with the Ministry of Defence".

Jackson, a dealer in used military equipment, was sent down for two years and eight months for breaking the arms embargo on Sudan by selling 15 Hagglund BV206s worth nearly £500,000. He had applied for an export licence from the Department of Trade and Industry (as it then was) to send the troop carriers to Sudan in 2005, but it was refused. According to HMRC, he then sent the vehicles "on a circuitous route to Sudan via intermediaries in Norway in an attempt to disguise the final destination".

When HMRC investigators raided the offices of Jackson's firm, L. Jackson & Co, in Doncaster in 2007, they uncovered evidence of a "systematic and deliberate fraud". Jackson initially told them the troop carriers were for an oil firm called White Nile Petroleum but that the company had gone bust so he had simply returned the goods to Norway. But in August this year he admitted illegally exporting the vehicles to Sudan. One of Jackson's employees, Steve Smithey, was given a suspended sentence and 150 hours' community service after admitting he too knew that the vehicles were going to end up in the troubled African nation.

L. Jackson & Co is used by the MoD to sell British military vehicles, plant and equipment when they are replaced or removed from service, in an effort to re-coup some of the cost. The company says that role "requires us to work with the MoD around the world including our current operations in Iraq".

Only this summer, with HMRC's investigation of Andrew Jackson well underway, the MoD was still using his company's services in Iraq. An article in the MoD's *Defence News* on the sale of non-weaponry ex-military kit in Iraq, including pick-up trucks that would cost more to transport back to the UK than they are worth, reveals that: "The kit is being tendered by international company L Jackson, who are responsible for advertising, viewings, payments and removal from the Contingency Operating Base, the main UK forces base near Basra."

CRIME

Scope for improvement

THE recent inquest into the deaths of Fiona Pilkington and her disabled daughter Frankie, who died in a burning car after suffering 11 years of abuse from teenagers in Barwell, Leicestershire, was shocking enough. But it was not an isolated case.

As report after report has shown, the repeated harassment of disabled people and their families is a common problem in Britain.

The most comprehensive report, *Getting Away with Murder*, published last year by the charity Scope, found that not only were disabled people and their families targeted, but that criminals who harass, attack, torture or even murder the disabled are treated more leniently than those guilty of other types of hate crime. The criminal justice system, it said, fails to investigate, prosecute or sentence crimes against the disabled with vigour.

Earlier this year the Equality and Human Rights Commission also produced a hard-hitting report. This concluded: "For many disabled people in Britain, safety and security is a right frequently denied. Violence and hostility can be a daily experience… so much so that many disabled people begin to accept it as a part of everyday life."

Scope identified a significant disparity when judges sentenced perpetrators of disability hate crimes compared to other hate crimes, such as those motivated by racism.

In five of the most notorious racist murders of the last few years (those of Kriss Donald in 2004, Anthony Walker in 2005, Isiah Young-Sam in 2005, Lee Phipps in 2006 and Mohammed Pervaiz in 2006), 10 of the 13 killers responsible – more than three-quarters – were sentenced to more than 20 years. In contrast, just four out of 17 – just one-quarter – of those responsible for the murders of eight disabled victims (Albert Adams in 2005, Keith Philpott in 2005, Rikki Judkins in 2006, Sean Miles in 2006, Steven Hoskin in 2006, Barrie-John Horrell in 2006, Colin Greenwood in 2007 and Brent Martin in 2007) received sentences of more than 20 years.

The Crown Prosecution Service, said Scope, was also less likely to achieve a successful prosecution in a trial involving a disabled victim, compared to those involving a minority ethnic or gay victim. Many cases involving disabled victims never reach trial because victims are assumed to be "unreliable".

Those in the criminal justice system have promised to make the system more responsive but the number of convictions remains low.

TESCO

Rinking feeling

TESCO is trying to wriggle out of a promise not to close down an ice rink before completing a replacement leisure centre for skaters and swimmers in south London.

The supermarket giant only won permission in 2003 for a major new supermarket on the site of the current Streatham Ice Rink by agreeing not to bring in the bulldozers until it had completed building a new rink and swimming pool complex nearby, to be part of the Streatham Hub complex, including homes, shops and a bus terminal.

But it emerged last month that a legal development agreement between Tesco and Lambeth council, guaranteeing that the old rink would not close until the new one was open, was never signed. At a public meeting, a Tesco spokesman told skaters and other locals that the Hub would still happen, but that Tesco could not confirm "continuity of ice" and that it was reconsidering the "delivery programme". In other words, it wants to build its own store first. Revised plans are to be submitted before the end of the year.

Tesco has already dragged its feet in Streatham, where work was supposed to have started on the Hub in early 2008, while the current rink has suffered from disrepair under the supermarket's ownership. However, it is still home to numerous ice hockey teams and used by skaters who are training for the February Winter Olympics in Canada, as well as for recreational public skating.

PRISON DEATHS

Suicide watch

PHIL WHEATLEY, head of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS), recently claimed that "improvements to detox and mental-health treatment" in the last ten years was key to ensuring "prison is survivable".

Really? This month inquest juries have returned damning verdicts on four unnecessary custody deaths, all four inmates having mental health and/or drug problems. The youngest was a very troubled boy of only 15.

Two weeks ago an inquest jury found "systemic failings" contributed to Liam McManus's suicide in Lancaster Farms young offender institution. The teenager had a history of self-harm and had been seeing a mental-health worker for two years when he was sentenced to six weeks for breaching the terms of a supervision order.

Three weeks into the sentence in 2007, he hanged himself with his bedsheet. He had been moved to a wing with reduced staff levels, meaning young prisoners were locked in cells for longer, leading to more unrest, shouting and bullying. The prison service ombudsman found that no staff on duty that day were trained in resuscitation, and that there were delays before officers called an ambulance.

Last week a jury at St Pancras coroner's court in London brought a verdict of accidental death, contributed to by neglect, on Paul Calvert, who hanged himself in Pentonville Prison two days after being remanded for breaching bail for theft. He had a history of drug addiction, self-harm and suicide attempts and was in detox. Before hanging himself, he pressed his emergency cell alarm, but it was not immediately answered. There was evidence to show that officers were playing backgammon and that some alarms had been disabled. There were also concerns that there had been no proper assessment of Calvert's risk of suicide, and about staff levels and training.

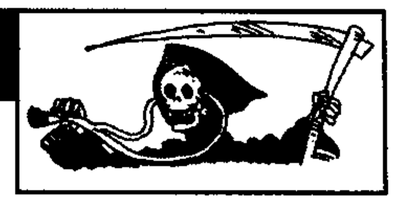
Another London inquest jury heard how a prisoner at Brixton prison had such severe pneumonia that he had developed abscesses in his lungs – yet it went undetected by prison and medical staff. Rory Kinloch, 38, had been remanded for failing to answer a police warrant for shoplifting. A week later he was dead. Doctors had been giving him methadone for his addiction, but were unaware he had both asthma and pneumonia until after he died. Crucial information about his medical history had been mislaid and he had not been given even a basic examination. One GP described a chaotic system in the jail that prompted him to resign in protest, saying he would "rather work in the third world than for the Prison Service".

Meanwhile in Dunstable an inquest jury found – yet again – that a remand prisoner with mental health and heroin problems had not received proper medical care before he too hanged himself with torn bedsheets in Bedford Prison.

Michael Taylor, 39, on remand for burglary, had been treated with methadone in Wormwood Scrubs, until he was transferred without warning to Bedford because the Scrubs was overcrowded. Only two months before he was transferred, the medical officer had written to health ministers about the lack of adequate provision for addicts in Bedford. But when Taylor arrived he was forced to go "cold turkey". Four days later, he was found hanging in his cell. So much for Wheatley's claims of an "effective, smooth detox experience…"

Deborah Coles of Inquest, the charity which supports families of those who die contentious deaths, said: "The deaths reveal the complacency and indifference to systemic failings that if addressed could prevent future death. Overcrowding, transfers of prisoners and the ongoing imprisonment of vulnerable people means there is the ever-present risk of suicide and self-harm."

NHS PLC



Fraud help us

WHY is the investigation into NHS audit agency Parkhill still rumbling on more than three years after whistleblowers first raised concerns with the central NHS Counter Fraud Service (see *Eyes* 1246 and 1247)?

Figures for fraud spending obtained by Lib Dem MP Norman Lamb suggest it might be because the service is hopelessly overstretched.

In five years since 2004/05 the NHCFS budget has been slashed by 26 percent, from £13.9m to £10.3m, while staff have been cut by 33 percent, from 289 to 195. Money recovered for the NHS has fallen by 73 percent, from £7.1m to £2m. The cuts emerged from a review of "arm's length bodies" imposed on the NHS by the Treasury under Gordon Brown's 2004 "efficiency" review.

In the same period the health budget, by contrast, has risen by 25 percent to more than £90bn and payments going outside the NHS, for example to the contractors employed by Parkhill, have correspondingly escalated. In other words, the opportunities for health fraudsters have increased, but they're less likely to be caught.

Duffed up over IT

UNDER the disastrous £13bn NHS IT programme (*Eyes passim ad nauseam*) half the hospitals in the country are due to have completely new IT systems using software called Lorenzo, designed by arguably the worst company to have been involved on the project (which is saying something), iSoft.

The company was bought by IBA of Australia two years ago; but improvements are a long time coming. So poor is Lorenzo that in the five large trusts where it has been installed, there have been just 174 intermittent users out of an estimated total of 15,000 computer users. Many have chosen to continue using the old software.

Although the trusts have paid just £471,000 for Lorenzo to date (still £2,700 per occasional user), health minister Mike O'Brien has admitted that the costs when fully "deployed" will be £27m, an average of £5.4m per trust.

Some in the industry say this is about five times a reasonable price. But since the central contracts imposing the Lorenzo software penalise trusts if they don't take it, hospitals have to buy the duff product while quietly carrying on with their old software anyway.

Pharma's market

PHARMACISTS who cash in on the collapse in the value of sterling and the relatively low price of some medicines in the UK by selling their stock elsewhere in Europe have been told to stop because their actions are causing shortages here in the UK.

Figures produced this month suggest that one in seven UK pharmacies is using the exchange rate and a UK government deal to secure cheaper medicines for the NHS to sell abroad and make a profit. As a consequence, some medicines, including certain anti-depressants, breast cancer and transplant drugs, are now in short supply in UK pharmacies.

Pharmaceutical industry bodies, doctors' organisations and the Department of Health have now agreed guidelines telling pharmacists that because their code of ethics says they must "make the care of patients their first concern", exporting medications in short supply for commercial gain "could" be a breach of the code. Even NHS hospital pharmacies have had to be reminded that exporting medicines for short term financial gain is "wholly unacceptable and contrary to acceptable professional standards".

CORPORATE INSOLVENCY

OFT touch

ACTION is at last being taken against the scandalous corporate insolvency industry following the *Eye's* recent exposés of accountants who exploit their position to bring companies down rather than rescue them and then pocket vast administration fees.

Last month Labour MP David Taylor picked up on the treatment of Yorkshire business Premier Motorauctions by PwC (see *Eye* 1248) and, in his words, "their egregious conflicts of interest", calling in parliament for a debate on the "insolvency gravy train… whereby the practitioners get the pounds and creditors get the pence".

A fortnight later the Office of Fair Trading launched an investigation into corporate insolvency including "any features in the market which could result in harm".

Alas, it is all rather late. Reform has long been needed but was always ducked in the name of "light touch" regulation. In 1999, for example, the owner of a company called Heritage plc managed to get the matter debated in the Commons through his MP, Rudi Vis. He was fobbed off with reassurances that banks and beancounters had "codes of practice". Ten years on, these ambiguous codes have proved toothless and self-regulation of the insolvency business has in practice meant no regulation.

The OFT can only recommend changes and it will almost certainly be the Tories who are asked to act after the general election. And who will they turn to for advice? No doubt to their current principal economic adviser… PwC!

PS: Latest to blame their company's downfall on the beancounters' conflicts of interest are the former chairman and chief executive of Woolworths, who last week claimed the company's bank's adviser Deloitte failed to back a management buy-out, preferring the administration and collapse of the company which generated millions in fees for, er, Deloitte (which also happens to be a big Tory donor).

ACTIS

Go for the juggler

HOW does privatised international development fund manager Actis make bumper profits even as the funds it manages for taxpayer-owned CDC, formerly the Commonwealth Development Corporation, plummet in value (see last *Eye*)?

In January last year CDC announced that it was putting money into a new "infrastructure fund" to be run by Actis. A major part of the deal was to "seed" the fund with CDC-owned Globeleq, a group of privatised power generation companies in sub-Saharan Africa, valued at $167m. These were already managed by Actis through the Actis Energy fund but, with the deal completed last month, will now be managed as part of the new infrastructure fund. There is, however, little change in real ownership; the Globeleq companies will still be approximately 85 percent owned by CDC, just via a different "limited partnership".

But the principles of private equity that have been deemed appropriate for the investment of public money in the developing world dictate that such a transfer amounts to a total sale, on which the fund managers are entitled to a profit share. CDC has confirmed this will have been paid, but won't say how much it is because of "confidentiality provisions in the legal documentation".

What is clear is that a troubled public fund supposedly directed at poverty relief has paid fees to private equity millionaires for transferring investments from one pocket to another.

Small wonder Actis could take $118m in fees from CDC in 2008. With the Actis-managed funds valued at £453m, or around $750m, at the year end, that's a 15 percent fee extraction from a loss-making fund. Which is what happens when poverty relief meets private equity.

HOUSING

To Kerr is human

KEITH "Charismatic" Kerr, last chief executive of the black housing association Ujima, which went belly up owing £28m, had a novel explanation for the disaster: his dismissal for gross incompetence was, er, racist.

Ujima's collapse in December 2007 left a huge hole in the provision of housing and specialist support for young black people. Its 4,600 homes were handed to the housing association London & Quadrant, which promptly sold off its care homes and shed staff. A police investigation into alleged fraud at Ujima has led to three people being arrested. Two of these have been charged, but the third is on the run. The alleged fraud was not of sufficient scale to bankrupt Ujima.

Kerr (pictured), the former whizzkid special adviser to Charles Kennedy and ex-managing director of Bournemouth Airport, failed last month to convince an employment tribunal that his dismissal from Ujima amounted to racial discrimination. He insisted he was never "ultimately responsible" for the association's financial position – despite drawing a £130,000 salary to run the show. So who or what was responsible for turning Ujima's £7m surplus in 2004-05 into a £28m loss in just two years – the highest recorded in social housing history?

Losses mounted as a result of "Project Jerusalem", Kerr's overly-ambitious expansion plan, dreamed up with a crew of expensive consultants soon after he took over in January 2006.

The man supposedly checking Ujima's books was George Avwunu, the chief financial officer who was appointed personally by Kerr in February 2007 even though the recruitment firm handling the appointment had not recommended him for a second interview. Avwunu was later suspended following claims he had been involved in fraudulent business activity in Nigeria. Avwunu is now on the run from police after failing to make a bail appearance in May. He was arrested last year with Rose Avwunu, who police describe as "a housewife", and Paul Campagne, a consultant – both of whom were charged with money-laundering offences in September.

Management accounts which were meant to provide monthly snapshots of Ujima's finances dried up following Avwunu's appointment.

Meanwhile the association showered outside consultants with cash. Avwunu recruited an IT consultant for £2,000 a week to do work that would normally command a salary of £25,000 a year; and Kerr hired a human resources consultant for £10,000 a month. Staff meanwhile leapt at an over-generous redundancy scheme sparking a mass exodus costing £600,000.

Kerr and Co also enjoyed benefits unusual in the housing association world. Ujima – Swahili for "working together" – rented an executive box at Reading football club, while its Wembley office complex had a £2m makeover by Metro Design. Kerr himself pocketed £32,000 in expenses in his two years as boss.

The Housing Corporation, the housing association watchdog, eventually appointed statutory advisors to Ujima's board in October 2007. Kerr was suspended in November and dismissed two months later. Staff are said to have applauded when they heard the news.

LYNDE HOUSE

Slow notion of justice

SEVEN and a half years after complaints were first made about neglect and abuse of elderly residents of Lynde House, run at the time by Chai Patel's Westminster "Care" Homes, the case has still not been decided by the Nursing & Midwifery Council (NMC).

The residents of the home themselves have long since died. Their relatives are having to rely on the fourth barrister to be instructed in the case – the latest has just resigned for health reasons. The case is also on to its second panel and legal adviser. Many of the original charges have now been rejected or withdrawn without relatives knowing why.

After the latest five-month break, the case against the only two people to face any disciplinary action for a catalogue of failings at the west London care home resumes next month. But as the government's health spokesman Baroness Thornton recently conceded in the Lords, it was "completely unacceptable" the case had dragged on so long.

Sarah Johnson, manageress of the old people's home, and Lyn Maggs, the matron, face allegations relating to the care of several residents during a six-year period ending in 2002. These include failing to ensure residents were washed, fed and given fluids, failing to ensure call bells were answered, and failing to ensure that care plans were drawn up and medicines were kept and administered properly.

Eye readers will recall how a report found that frail patients at the then £600-a-week home had been left for hours sitting in their own waste, and suffered preventable falls and unexplained bruising (*Eyes passim*). Some were left unmoved for so long they developed bed sores. Charges against four other nurses, including a local-authority inspector who had given Lynde House a clean bill of health, were earlier thrown out by the NMC.

The families had tried to hold Dr Patel himself to account by launching a professional-conduct complaint to the General Medical Council, alleging that he had failed to ensure the wellbeing of people in one of his homes. But the "caring tycoon" persuaded a high court judge to throw out the GMC neglect case on the basis that he was being made a scapegoat for the home's ills. (The nurses too had tried and failed in 2007 to get a high court judge to intervene in their case on similar grounds, but that only delayed the matter further.)

Relatives say the delays mean the system is failing the vulnerable in care or in hospitals. But for those with disciplinary charges hanging over them, it is also far from ideal to have "justice" delayed. Sadly their case is not unique. The Lords heard last month that there are eight cases before the NMC that have taken more than five years.

POLICE

Hitting the fans

SUNDERLAND AFC supporters are guilty until proven innocent, it seems.

Even though no fan has so far been charged following clashes with police at Newcastle station after a pre-season friendly three months ago, all 44 fans subsequently arrested have been banned from matches and had their season tickets suspended.

Eye readers will recall Northumbria police's touching press release (*Eye* 1245) claiming that rampaging fans, bent on trouble, had kicked, punched to the ground and stamped on four police dogs. But following a freedom of information request, they were forced to admit that no dog, nor police officer, had received any injury requiring medical or veterinary treatment. Two dogs were said to have "tenderness" on their bodies.

By contrast at least four Sunderland fans were hospitalised or needed emergency treatment, three with severe head wounds apparently caused by being beaten over the head with batons. A fourth had a dog-bite wound to his stomach. Others had minor injuries. Fans, who give a very different account to police of events at Newcastle station on 8 August, claim officers mismanaged the football crowd at the station, and used excessive force.

After a three-month investigation, during which supporters' phones and computers were seized, no charge has yet been brought. The Football Supporters' Federation says it is clear that many of the 44 arrested will see no further action from the police. But Sunderland has told them they are not welcome at the Stadium of Light while they remain on police bail. Anyone arrested for football violence – irrespective of the merits – is banned until the results of the investigation is proved. Unfortunately police have extended the fans' bail until 21 December. So much for natural justice.

CAIRNGORM RAILWAY

Funicular cortege

THE vast true cost of the ill-fated Cairngorm Mountain Railway is finally becoming clear and the figures are eye-watering.

Building the tourist train spiralled far beyond the budget set by the Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) development agency and has already cost the public £23m in construction and support for the struggling operating company.

The Scottish parliament's public audit committee heard evidence from Audit Scotland last week that: "HIE did not review or adjust the business case before construction started in 1999 to take account of, for example, the declining number of skiers and the evidently weak financial position of the operating company."

The funicular railway was finally taken into public ownership by HIE last year to save it from going bust. "Although HIE hopes to find a new operator… that might prove difficult in the current economic climate," auditor-general Robert Black told the committee, warning members: "If HIE cannot establish a viable business model for the funicular, and it ceases to operate, HIE might have to reinstate the land, repay the EU's money and meet any other costs."

Audit Scotland guestimates that it could cost between £30m and £50m to reinstate the mountain, up to £2.7m to return the EU grant, added to which would be redundancies, lawyers' fees and the like.

This is similar to the estimate made by Alan Blackshaw, the non-executive director of HIE who quit in 2000 while highlighting the wildly optimistic projected visitor numbers and the close ties between HIE and Morrison Group, which won the contract to build the railway (*Eyes passim*).

GOBBLEDEGOOK

Stupid letter of the week

***EYE* reader Jason Price was baffled when O2 wrote to him to explain that – despite being a phone company – it was "unable to provide you any phone number to make a complaint".**

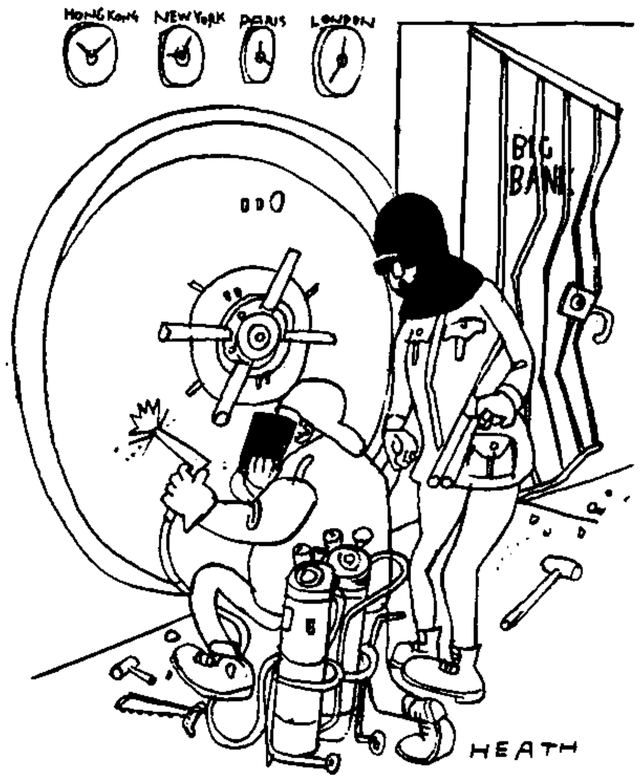
But apparently he wasn't nearly as baffled as the people at O2 customer services themselves, who appear to have become confused as to what business they're in, concluding their email: "We appreciate and value your business with us. Have a happy stay."

In the City

TORY donor supreme Lord (Michael) Ashcroft – £10m and counting – has been busy revamping the company at the heart of the dispute about his seeming boundless generosity.

No doubt this has nothing to do with the ongoing Electoral Commission investigation into Bearwood Corporate Services and whether it is a "permissible" political donor or merely a conduit for money from multiple citizen Ashcroft – who may not be registered to vote, so cannot donate personally – via companies in Belize.

BCS had been transformed into a very different corporate animal even before the inquiry began – one that suddenly has substantial and largely new UK-based activities, so presumably meeting the requirement that it "carries on business" in the UK; one that no longer has an elongated ownership structure; and therefore a company the Electoral Commission may now have some difficulty in finding is not (or perhaps never was) ineligible to donate the £4.5m it has provided the Tories in cash and services since 2003.



"Wouldn't it be easier to get the money by just working here?"

Until now BCS appeared to be a small company providing management/consultancy services, mainly to other Ashcroft group companies – who paid around £1m between 2007 and 2009. It has been in the Ashcroft empire since the 1980s. From 2004 to 2007, as it stepped up its donations to the Tories, it had been substantially loss-making, accumulating net losses of £1.6m and net assets of £4m for its ultimate owner, Stargate Holdings, based at Ashcroft's Belize Bank.

But the latest BCS accounts filed last month change all that. Between April 2007 and September 2008, its financial period was extended to 18 months, the company acquired investment assets of £13.4m compared with the puny figure of land worth just £3,000 at March 2007. Cash almost doubled to £6.7m. How was this achieved? Approaching £9.5m was owed to unidentified creditors within the next 12 months, and a similar amount after 12 months. However accumulated losses had more than doubled to almost £4m and net assets had more than halved to £1.65m. Although these accounts were signed off in early March, they were only filed at Companies House in mid-October.

Despite these large new numbers, according to auditors BDO Stoy Hayward, BCS is still eligible to claim the exemption to produce only the very limited, abbreviated financial statements allowed by special provisions for "small companies". It is also not required to produce consolidated accounts including its subsidiaries because it heads a "small group". Previously Bearwood had only claimed the exemption for "small companies".

However, we are at least told what the £13m bought. First there is investment management services provider Anne Street Partners. This company has featured as a lender to AIM-listed pub group London Town, in which Ashcroft has a substantial interest. It loaned £2.5m to London Town in December 2006. Anne Street made profits of £534,000. Clearly a business carried on here.

Then there are two offshore companies – Velvet Heights from Belize and Manco Investment from the British Virgin Islands. They are better known as the companies through which Ashcroft controls 57 percent of another AIM-listed company, catering and recruitment group Impellam, which owns the Blue Arrow business. Plenty of trading and tax there, as well.

Finally BCS also acquired 26.5 percent of Biteback Media and 25.2 percent of Empire Media Productions. This places BCS at the centre of Ashcroft's new publishing ambitions. Biteback owns *Total Politics* magazine and is headed by Tory blogger Iain Dale. In September Ashcroft also invested in the Conservativehome and Politicshome websites. These could perhaps find their way into BCS as more UK business.

Empire Media is a TV/DVD programme producer run by Mark Souster, who has worked on projects with Ashcroft including a documentary on Victoria Cross winners – a subject close to the peer's heart and wallet as a major collector.

Just when all these investments were made or how much was paid for each is not revealed. But it is clear that BCS was very much trading during the period after March 2007 when it made several donations to the Conservatives – £575,000 in cash between June 2007 and February 2008 plus £2,243,000 in "consultancy, focus groups, opinion research, printing and related costs" between June 2007 and June 2009.

There has also been another significant change in the BCS position which may well impact on the issues under consideration by the Electoral Commission. Prior to March this year, BCS was at one end of a long corporate food chain ending in Belize with Stargate. But in March the two intermediate companies through which Stargate exercised that control and through which went £4.79m to subscribe for new BCS shares – thereby raising questions about the source of the Tory donations – were wound up.

Bearwood Holdings and Astraporta (UK) were both put into voluntary liquidation by their shareholders (respectively Astraporta and Stargate) on March 5 and their assets distributed to those shareholders. Holdings had assets of £1.7m and Astraporta £2.3m before a £500,000 debt to Stargate.

It is doubtless entirely coincidental and unrelated that by February the Electoral Commission had launched an official investigation into the BCS donations. It had begun its inquiries in October last year after the Stargate issue first surfaced. News of the investigation was revealed on 22 February.

The issue now for the Electoral Commission therefore may be more how BCS funded the donations it made before April 2007 – some £1m in cash and almost £700,000 in services – than what has happened since.

At the time the first BCS donation of £15,000 was made in February 2003, BCS was ultimately owned by a Belize company which was either under the control of Lord Ashcroft – a British as well as Belizean and Turks and Caicos citizen – or in which he had an interest. The Belize ownership was no secret and three of those four corporate links were in the UK and so liable for UK tax. But it is impossible to see how Stargate is financed and the source of its money – a UK or foreign bank loan or inter-group finance. But the actual source of the money is not a matter the rules address, only the eligibility of the "permissible" corporate donor – a UK-registered company that "carries on business" in the UK.

BCS was the only trading company. Holdings was merely that – a holding company – and did not trade. Ditto Astraporta. Since the change of control to Belize in 2000, BCS only produced abbreviated accounts for the years from 2001 which do not disclose its turnover or profits, or even state what business it is engaged in. Holdings and Astraporta also only provided abbreviated accounts with limited financial data.

BCS had a history of six-figure turnover and profits before it first became a donor, so had cash reserves from real business activity. In the year to March 2003, BCS made a net profit of £148,000, so was well able to afford the £24,000 it donated. It also had cash of £242,000.

In the year to March 2004, when it donated a total of £22,500 in cash, BCS made a small net profit of £8,000 but had almost £1m in cash after a new capital injection of £750,000 from Holdings – effectively from a similar loan to Holdings from Sierra Investments. There is a Belize company of that name based at Ashcroft's bank. The cash balances were more than enough to pay the donations even without the proceeds from new shares.

But then in the year to March 2005, ahead of that year's election, BCS poured money into the Tories, especially in targeted seats, donating some £563,000 in cash plus £12,000 in services or fundraising. That compares with the net loss it made for the year of £627,000. This would suggest that there were other trading expenses, if not income. That loss, and it can be inferred perhaps the donations, were probably financed partly out of the cash balances, which shrank by £657,000 to £335,000. That cash was in turn partly reliant on the share subscription money from the previous year sourced from Sierra via Holdings.

In the year to March 2006, BCS donated £356,000 in cash plus another £130,000 in services or sponsorship. For that year the company showed a net loss of £504,000. The cash donations figure was higher than the opening cash balance of £335,000. But during the year there was an injection of £4.79m subscribed for new shares originating from £6m injected into Astraporta by Stargate and flowing down through Holdings to BCS. This more than covered the losses and left BCS with cash balances of £4.722m at the year-end.

In the year to March 2007, BCS donated just £59,000 cash but £552,000 in services. BCS lost £630,000 that year – only a little more than the total of donations. However, the amount of cash in the company dropped by £1.278m to £3.44m. This again could suggest it was incurring and financing trading expenses/losses as well as donations.

The £2.8m BCS has donated since March 2007 – £575,000 in cash and £2.24m in services – would probably need to rely in part on the cash balances or loans, even allowing for the new acquisitions or the payments from Ashcroft companies for consultancy services.

It is unclear how the non-cash services are costed or paid for or how they are accounted for in the BCS books. But cash is cash and the £1.6m BCS has donated since 2003 has certainly been available in its bank accounts either from loans, new capital or trading revenues or all of the above.

Companies issue new shares for a variety of reasons. One is to cover trading losses or to finance future spending. This appears to be what was happening in the BCS group from 2005, when it begins serious donating. BCS did not have enough trading revenues to cover the donations which create trading losses. So in order to balance the books, it needed to inject new finance.

The first cash injection was via the Sierra Investments loan to Holdings of £750,000 made in the year to March 2004. Holdings in turn invested first £250,000 in July 2003 and then £500,000 in December 2003 in new BCS shares.

Sierra was repaid from the capital subscription in Holdings made by Astraporta in October 2005 (£1.54m) and/or March 2006 (£4m). That £5.54m share subscription enabled Holdings to make a further subscription of £4.79m in new BCS shares. All these transactions – starting with £6m injected into Astraporta by Stargate – happen on the same days in October 2005 and March 2006. The second tranche arrived two days before the end of each company's financial year. This year, Stargate has invested further in BCS directly.

During July 2003 to October 2005 – the life of the £750,000 Sierra loan – BCS donated a total of £962,000. From October 2005, when it started receiving £4.79m for new shares, to 2008 BCS

☛ *See over...*

"Flippin' High Street's full of charity shops nowadays"

donated almost £3m in assorted services plus £628,000 in cash.

However, the problem for the Electoral Commission – which may be why it is still looking – is that this may all be perfectly legal. Knowing Ashcroft's reputation, it would be amazing if that was not so, even if it maybe tests the envelope. For a company to be a "permissible donor" it merely needs to be one that is registered here and "which carries on business" here. There is no definition of what that business has to be or that donations have to come from profits made in the UK, just from trading or business here with no definition as to what "business" means.

A company's trading/business resources include its cash balances and loans, either from banks or parent/associated companies. The money that foreign companies donate through their UK subsidiaries does not come with a certificate saying "earned in Britain" and may originate in a foreign bank account. Money is money.

Also the regulations are silent on the issue of who controls the donor, so long as the donor is a UK company that carries on business in the UK. Which BCS is, even if it is only or mainly Ashcroft business.

The Electoral Commission and Scotland Yard ran into similar problems of definition or lack of it when investigating Labour's loans for peerages.

So when looking at either the old or the new Bearwood Corporate Services, it is significant to recall that man of tax mystery Michael Ashcroft's statement that what is important is "who owned the money" that was being donated. And of that there can be no doubt.

'Slicker'

COULDN'T-MAKE-IT-UP NEWS

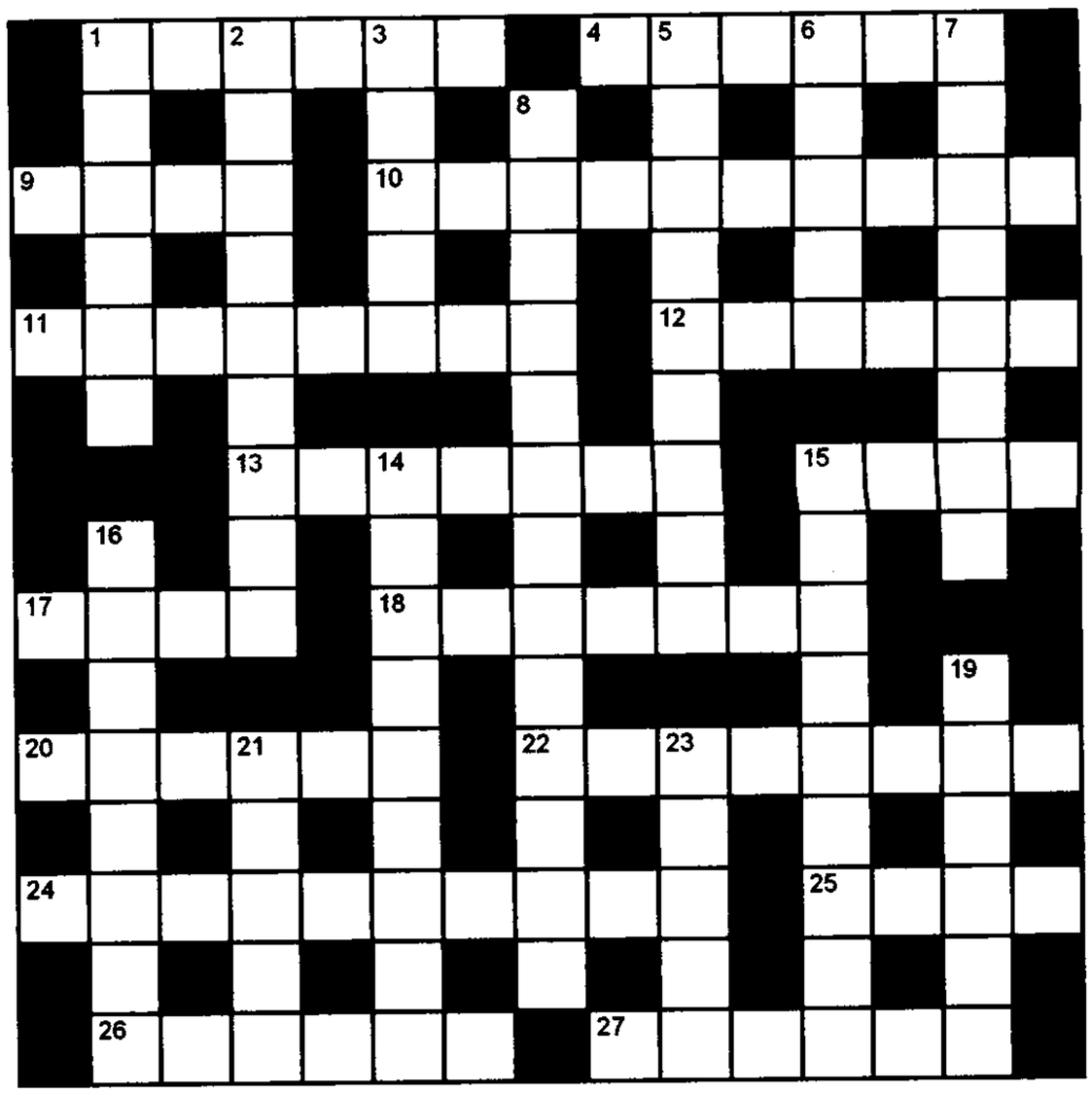
THE takeover of financial regulation by bankers came a step closer last week with the appointment of Jonathan Taylor, director-general of the London Investment Bankers Association (LIBA), to run the Treasury's financial services section which oversees the Financial Services Authority and sets regulatory policy.

While running LIBA since 2005 Taylor has been lobbyist-in-chief for the architects of the financial crisis, calling for lighter regulation and lobbying particularly hard (and effectively) against moves to tax the thousands of "non-domiciled" bankers in the City.

Before running LIBA Taylor worked on "public policy" at Swiss bank UBS, the bank that spawned his recent predecessor at the Treasury, James Sassoon, and Gordon Brown's favourite adviser and minister, Shriti Vadera. The bank, exposed this year by US authorities as a hotbed of tax evasion, also has one of its old boys in control of the taxpayer's stakes in state-owned banks following the appointment of Robin Budenberg as chief exec of UK Financial Investments.

EYE CROSSWORD 405

by Cyclops



£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 4 December 2009

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk

ACROSS

1 Relaxed state of Arnie hosting "America's Comeback" (6)
4 Royal family's surprise taking in of Posh? (6)
9 Goody-goody found in the City area? A big myth! (4)
10 Shit street trader? (4,6)
11 One who makes no.2 without one is a Judas! (8)
12 End of the Times? Neat! Ace! (6)
13 Magician's hard member – ecstasy when gripped by condor's wings (7)
15 See 25ac.
17 Who's ballsed up the performance? (4)
18 Smooth writer's fondled end (4,3)
20 Pictures made here of sexual athlete in outrageous tops (6)
22 Place for the outsider with ghastly flares, getting "firm" (8)
24 A dick you're holding? (7,3)
25/15 Measure fed up electorate's desire for Gordon to do this? (4,4)
26 The nation wants Bill back – and screwing Monica's butt (6)
27 Difficult performing with this? Even more so without it! (4-2)

DOWN

1 "Old boiler" – is that PC? (6)
2 Putting bag over scarlet woman who's objectionable – don't knock it (6,3)
3 A calling to account when car given to Tories' no.1 (5)
5 Prescott's confused about direction (not to be broadcast) (3,6)
6 'Fabulous author' Archer's chief affectation, doing a U-turn (5)
7 Brenda symbolically tender? Not any more (3,5)
8 Our Gordon, characterised as useless persuader restraining a muddled bunch endlessly (7,6)
14 Sun-abandoned, yellow Mr Heath insulted (9)
15 Action to hold newspapers down (9)
16 Cherie's endless rot, nonsensical hot air (8)
19 Viewed Conservative Right brought in as a trustworthiness test (6)
21 UK holiday area, one wracked with VD (5)
23 F-off, dear girl! (5)

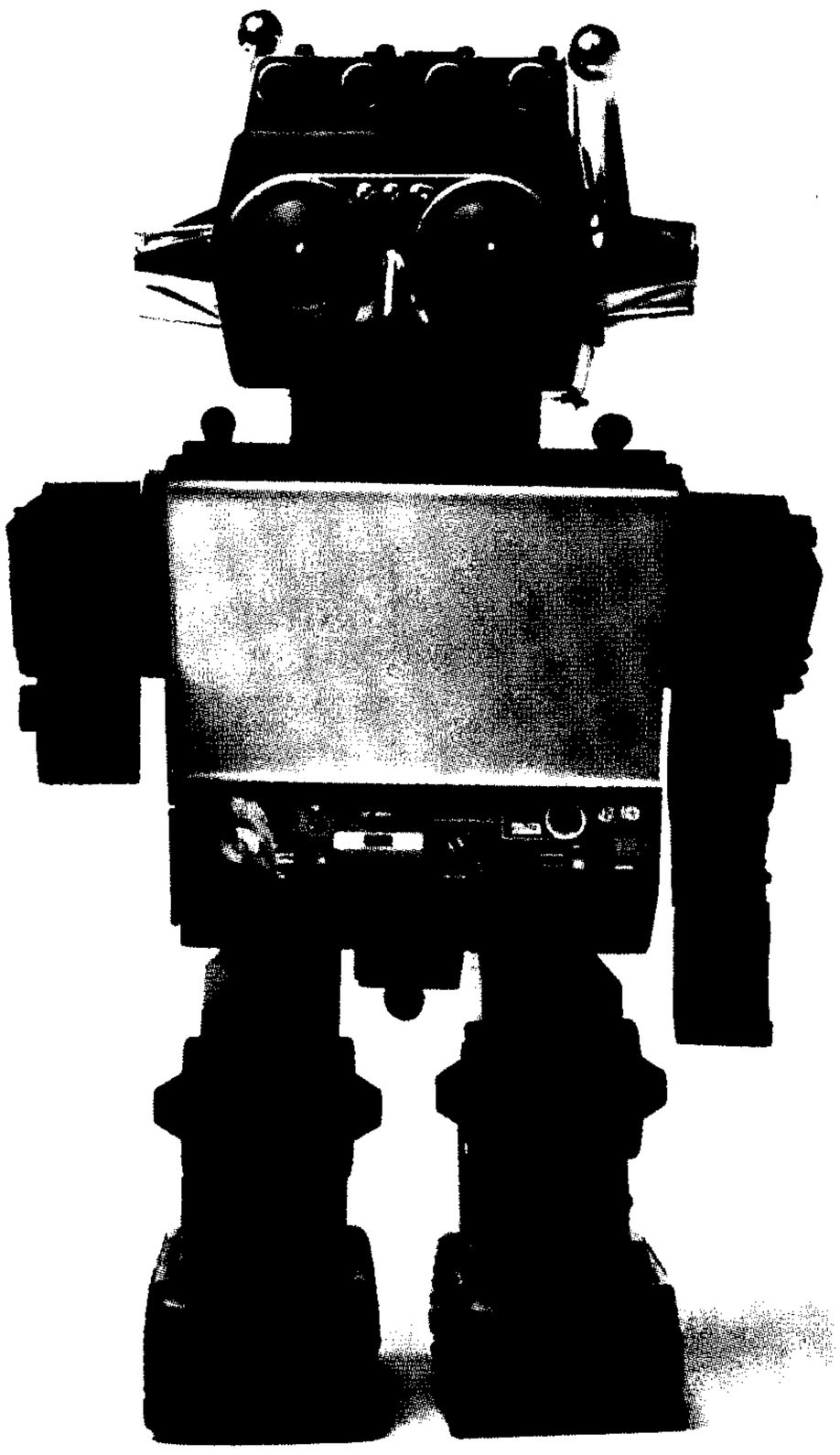
Crossword 404 winner: PHILIP LEES

ACROSS: 4 Blood type 10 Cherubim 11 Fiddle 12 Tut-tut 13 Arsonist 15 Roman Polanski 16 Lady-in-waiting 20/17 Lawrence Durrell 21 Typist 23 Hole up 25 Sociable 26 Utilities.

DOWN: 2 Nehru 3 Scrotum 5 Lumbago 7 Tidings 8/6 Polishing off 9 Abstention 14 Statistics 15 Roll about 18 Woe is me 19 Impeach 22/1 Split ends 24/27 Pet hate.

BIG ON THE FUTURE

If you're looking for investment success it helps to be completely open-minded.



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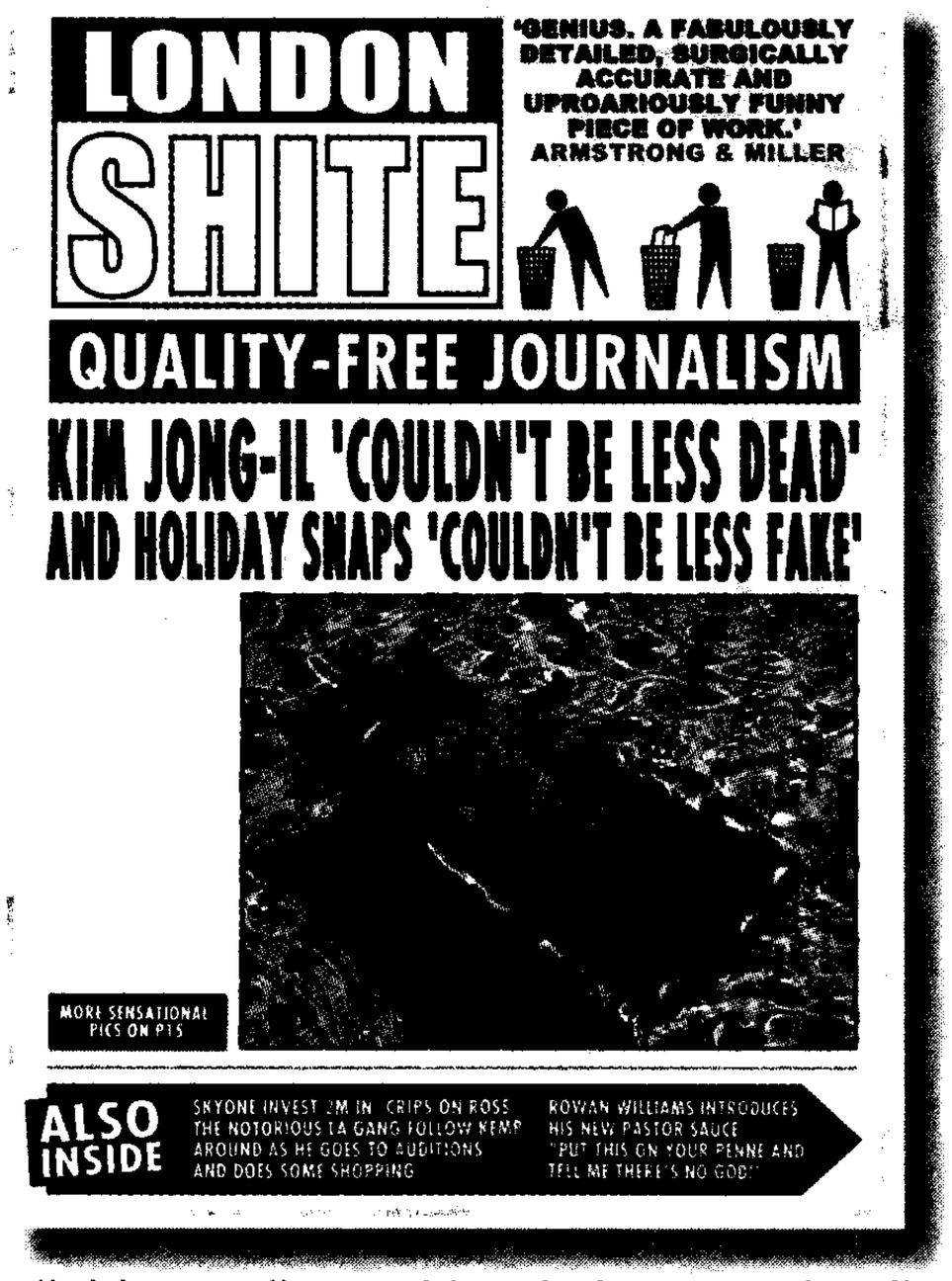
A tribute to freesheets, tabloid toss and meaningless advertising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QUALITY-FREE JOURNALISM
KIM JONG-IL 'COULDN'T BE LESS DEAD' AND HOLIDAY SNAPS 'COULDN'T BE LESS FAKE'
MORE SENSATIONAL PICS ON P15
ALSO INSIDE
SKYONE INVEST 2M IN 'CRIPS ON ROSS
THE NOTORIOUS LA GANG FOLLOW KEMP AROUND AS HE GOES TO AUDITIONS AND DOES SOME SHOPPING
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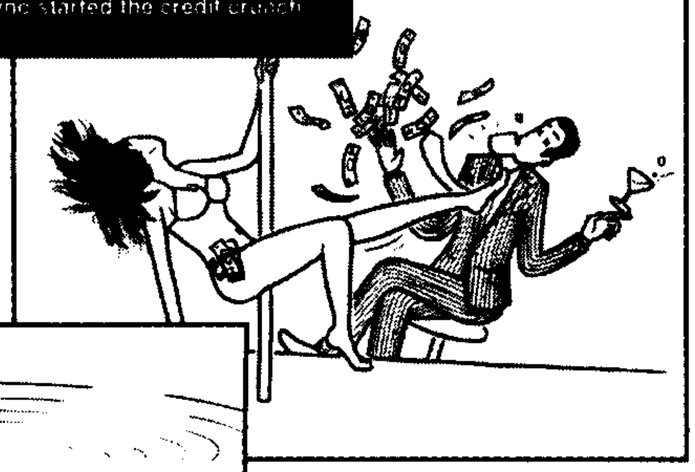

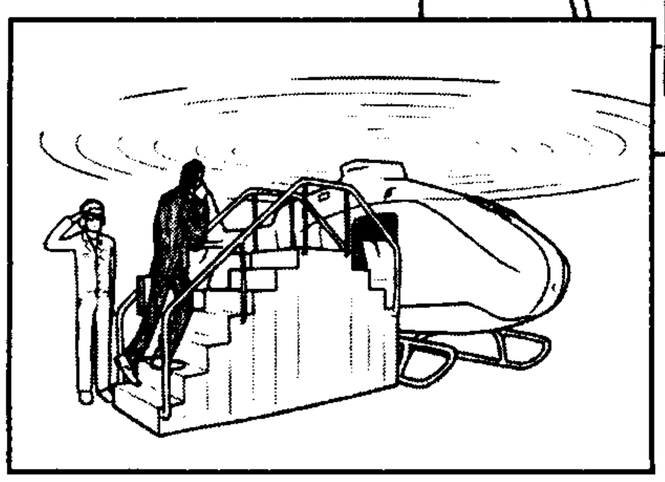

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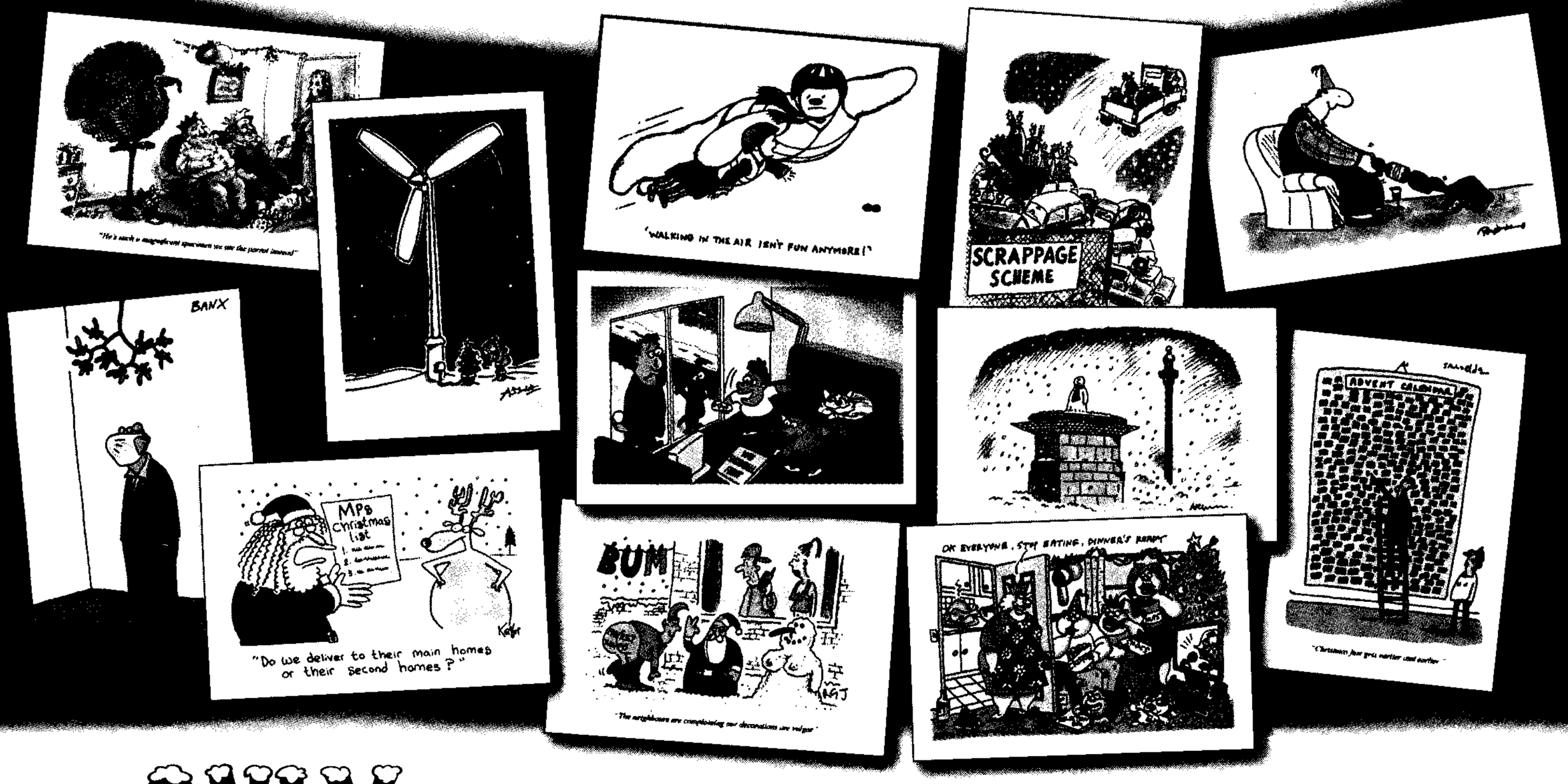
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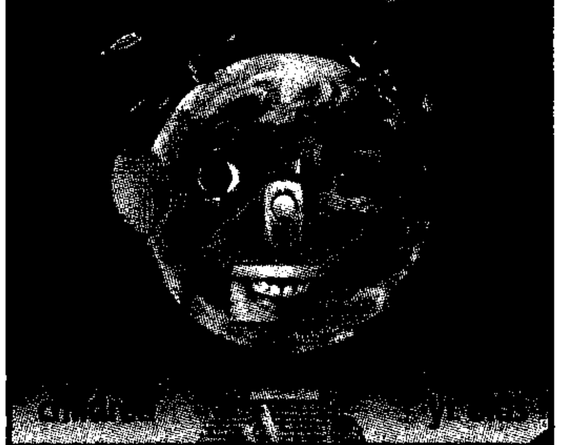

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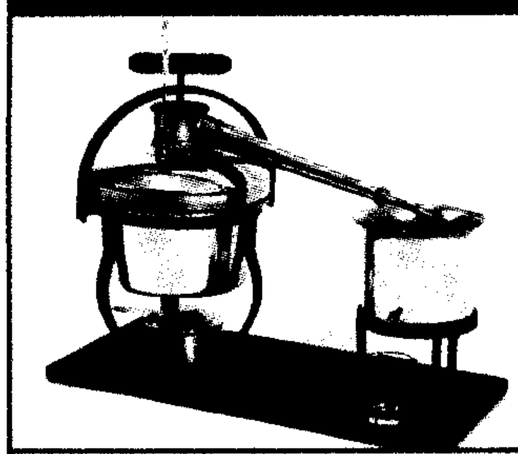

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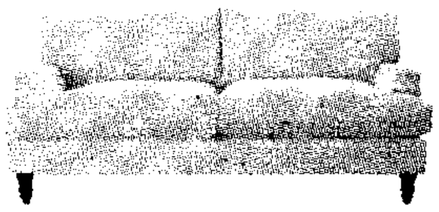

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When Martin Brennan designed the Brennan JB7 he threw out the rule book. The Brennan is a CD player with a hard disk that stores up to 5,000 CDs. It saves space and clutter and delivers near immediate access to an entire music collection. Customers rediscover/fall in love with their music again simply because the Brennan makes it so accessible.

The Brennan also records from vinyl and cassette so you can enjoy your entire music collection but keep it out of the way in another room or retire it to the attic.

You can use the JB7 in two ways. You can use it with loudspeakers or you can play it through your existing HiFi. The Brennan gives names to tracks and albums from a database of 2.6 million CDs as you load each CD. It takes a few minutes to load a CD.

Small enough to pick up with one hand.
Big enough for a lifetime of music.

The Brennan has a unique text search facility that shows a reducing number of matches as you press successive letters on the remote control. Once you get the hang of it you can find one track or album out of your entire music collection in a few seconds. So to find "Nessun Dorma" you would press letters "NES" or "DOR" and scroll through the shortlist of matches.

What's the point owning CDs you don't Play?

What's the point in owning hundreds of CDs worth thousands of pounds if you never listen to them? The problem with CDs is that it's quicker to make a cup of coffee than dip into a CD. Try timing how long it takes to pick a CD, load it in the CD player, play a snippet from a track or two, eject it and put it back where it came from. Then there is the problem of finding music. The print on a CD spine is tiny. What if the track is on a compilation CD? What if the CD is in the car? Then there is the clutter. You need to keep your CDs near the player or you wont play them. So you are forced to share your living space with hundreds of cheap plastic boxes.

CDs are great but they are also inconvenient, inaccessible and a bit of a chore - thats why Martin Brennan designed the Brennan JB7.

The Brennan JB7

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The face behind Brennan

Martin Brennan

Martin is a physicist and computer engineer. He has around twenty silicon chips to his name, written over a million lines of computer code and co-designed the world's first 64 bit games computer.

"I always liked the promise of CDs. It wasn't so much the quality but the quick access to a given track. After vinyl and cassette that was a real plus. My first CD player was a five CD multi changer. My second was a ten CD changer for the car. I liked the idea of quick access to more than one CD and music that didn't repeat after 40 minutes. These players were fine but a bit clunky - there were several seconds of silence between CDs and in the car I could never find the right CD.

A few years ago I had a go at loading my cassette collection onto a PC. Cassette were obsolete but I owned around 100 and the music on them reflected an important period in my life. I recorded all of the cassettes on to the PC over a period of several weeks.

The thing is I never listened to the music on the PC. Somehow using the computer to listen to music never worked out. Maybe the computer was in the wrong place but I think it lacked the immediacy of a physical play button. In the end the computer got a virus and the music files were lost - I still had the cassettes thankfully. The JB7 is really my personal ideal music player".

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